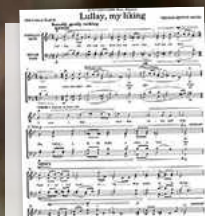


# music

## A CHORAL CHRISTMAS

We celebrate Britain's glorious cathedral choirs



**PLUS!** A specially commissioned carol composed by Thomas Hewitt Jones for you to sing! See p36

**Tchaikovsky**

The best discs of his Symphony No. 1

**Richard Morrison**

Peace, good will toward men

**15 neglected operas**

Masterpieces ripe for rediscovery

### IN YOUR SPECIAL ISSUE

**Ding dong merrily**

We try our hand at the ancient art of church bell-ringing

**Britten at Christmas**

How the festive season inspired some of his greatest choral works

**Anne-Sophie Mutter**

James Naughtie meets the legendary German violinist

**Bars of wonder**

What are classical music's most spine-tingling moments?

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# THE MONTH IN MUSIC

*The recordings, concerts, broadcasts and websites exciting us this Christmas*

## ONLINE **You review!**

There are thousands of musical events we never get to hear about, let alone attend. So this is where you come in! Whether you've attended a recital at your local church or a glamorous opera, we'd love to read your review. Write 300 words or so, send them to [youreview@classical-music.com](mailto:youreview@classical-music.com) and we'll print the best on our website.

GETTY

## ON STAGE **Top trumpet**

Who better to herald the arrival of the festive season than one of the world's finest trumpeters? The Norwegian Tine Thing Helseth will be doing just that when she appears with the Manchester Camerata. Bach, Vivaldi and Corelli's *Christmas Concerto* will be bringing more than a little jollity to the city's Albert Hall. *See p98*

## ON DISC **Roll out the carol**

For some fresh carols to serve alongside your traditional Christmas fare, the Choir of Worcester College has dug up some treats. *Nowell sing we*, the follow-up to 2012's *This Christmas Night*, features carols by all manner of contemporary composers, including Lennox Berkeley, Richard Rodney Bennett and Judith Bingham. *See p62*

## ON AIR **Wassail away**

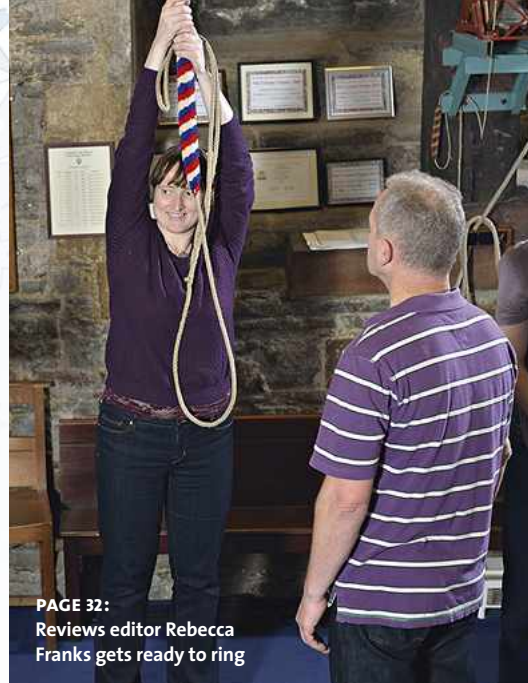
Have you ever wondered where the tradition of neighbourhood Christmas carol singing comes from? In Radio 3's *Early Music Show*, presenter Lucie Skeaping will be exploring the ancient custom of Wassailing (pictured), when peasant singers would go from house to house singing carols in return for a bowl of hot, mulled cider. *See p102*







**PAGE 22:**  
our cover stars, Wells  
Cathedral choristers Erin  
Davies and George Blundell



**PAGE 32:**  
Reviews editor Rebecca  
Franks gets ready to ring



**PAGE 28:**  
James Naughtie  
meets Anne-Sophie  
Mutter in Oxford

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Reviews editor Rebecca Franks heads to her local church to learn the noble art of bell-ringing

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We present Thomas Hewitt Jones's *Lullay, my liking*, commissioned for BBC Music readers

### 40 Bars of wonder

What are the breathtaking moments in music that have the critics' hairs standing on end?

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Some operas really should be better known – Robert Thicknesse names 15 prime examples



## THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS

**Andrew Stewart**  
Journalist and critic



'Modern life's digital distractions and mindless marketing noise feel all the more ridiculous when I hear a British cathedral choir at Christmas. Something magic happens in the moment their unique sounds and my full attention meet.' Page 22

**Rebecca Franks**  
BBC Music's reviews editor



'I've always loved the sound of bells – learning to bell-ring in Bristol's St Mary Redcliffe church in two months might have been a tall order, but it was also a lot of fun. Once you've got the hang of the basics, it's definitely a hobby for life.' Page 32

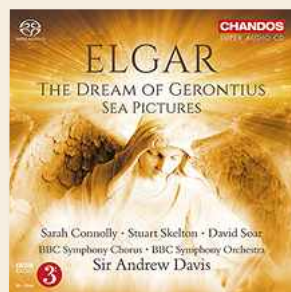
**Thomas Hewitt Jones**  
Composer



'I was delighted to be asked to compose this brand new carol, *Lullay, my liking*, for you, the readers of *BBC Music Magazine*. I hope you enjoy rehearsing and performing it with your choirs this Christmas. Please let us know how you get on!' Page 36

## CHRISTMAS REVIEWS

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# Welcome



For me, it could well have been bar 17 of JS Bach's Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor with its bold and frankly unexpected E flat 7 chord. Then again, that wonderful instant at bar 137 near the end of the first movement of

Prokofiev's Symphony No. 1, with its D major chord over a bass G, always makes me grin. This month, we've honed in on some of the greatest masterpieces and found out, with a little help from our friends, what their most incredible individual bars are. You know the sort of thing – that note, chord or short passage that charms you to the skies; the one you hunt for on your CD to play back to friends and family, desperate for them to understand your obsession with such a short snapshot of music. We'd love to hear what your own 'wow' bars are, so do drop us a line or email ([music@classical-music.com](mailto:music@classical-music.com)) and we'll share it with everyone else.

### *Lullay, my liking* is a gem of a piece, with scrunchy harmonic twists

Of course, you may find one of these special moments in our stunning new carol, *Lullay, my liking*, composed by Thomas Hewitt Jones and printed for you on p36. I wouldn't be surprised – it's a gem of a piece with delightful, scrunchy harmonic twists dotted throughout. As I mentioned here last month, we'd be delighted if you felt you could perform the piece in your Christmas concerts or services. It's scored for four-part unaccompanied SATB (so no need for an organ or piano) and makes only easy-to-moderate demands on singers. The composer has penned a rehearsal guide for you on p36 to help you with your interpretations. And we'd love to hear from you about it. Do get in touch with news of your performance or even a recording or video. We'd be touched to hear any of you tackle it, and I know Thomas Hewitt Jones would be thrilled, too. As well as cutting out the copy on p36, you can also download it from our website at [www.classical-music.com](http://www.classical-music.com) and share it as widely as you wish. Photocopying allowed!

Whatever music-making you take part in this month, whether as a player, singer or much appreciated listener, we'd all like to wish you a very merry Christmas.

*Oliver Condry*

Oliver Condry Editor

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The UK's Top 20 Specialist Classical releases

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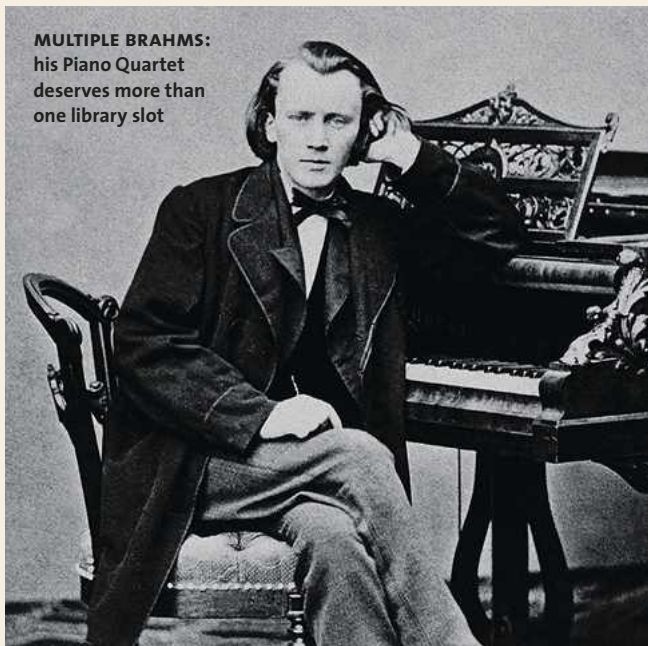


# LETTERS

Write to: The editor, *BBC Music Magazine*, Tower House, Fairfax Street, Bristol, BS1 3BN or email: [music@classical-music.com](mailto:music@classical-music.com)

## LETTER OF THE MONTH

**MULTIPLE BRAHMS:**  
his Piano Quartet  
deserves more than  
one library slot



## THE MORE THE BETTER

What a superb *Building a Library* Ivan Hewett gave us on Brahms's G minor Piano Quartet on Radio 3. His insights into the subtle differences in interpretation hugely enhanced the listening experience and understanding of the work and highlighted the essential two-stage process in the creation of music: composition and performance. The variety in performance is a fundamental reason why works written hundreds of years ago continue to inspire, fascinate and involve

us. The intellect and creativity of performers goes hand in hand with the genius of composition, and to consider that music can have one definitive performance strangles the art of interpretation. It continually evolves, and how intriguing it is to hear how this changes with time, personality, fashion and scholarship. Ironically, Hewett's survey eloquently showed that a library should never have only one version of a great work.  
*Hugh Savill, Tiverton*



Every month the editor will award a **SolarDAB 2 Roberts radio** (retail value £80 – see [www.robertsradio.co.uk](http://www.robertsradio.co.uk)) to the writer of the best letter received. The editor reserves the right to shorten letters for publication.

## I DON'T LIKE MONDAYS

In his evaluation of the challenges facing the new controller of Radio 3 Richard Morrison (December) is undoubtedly right in saying that these cannot be met by simply 'shuffling producers and programmes round the schedule'. But I feel that there is one schedule change more than any other that would indicate whether or not he wishes to break with the previous regime. This is the return of *Opera on 3* to Saturday evening. Opera can never be treated as background music, to be dipped into and out of; one needs to be able to sit down and follow the drama as it unfolds, a drama that might well start at six in the evening or even earlier. My own experience is that the Monday evening slot is deeply inappropriate for opera. The working week has just started; one might be preoccupied or on the road, have phone calls to make or just need an early night. Opera deserves a sense of occasion that a mere Monday lacks.

*Mark Whitaker, Hebden Bridge*

## TOO MUCH TALK

I do not agree with Richard Morrison that Alan Davey has to do a 'Murdoch' in order to boost Radio 3's ratings. I think there is a much more simple solution – keep the existing programmes, but change the schedule. To really enjoy Radio 3 at present you need to be retired or unemployed. The current diet of serious music in its entirety across the breadth of the repertoire and beyond is perfectly sustainable. The problem is that between 10pm and midnight, which are key listening hours for

those of us that work in offices, Radio 3 suddenly stops being Radio 3 and turns into Radio 4 with discussion programmes and drama, or into 6 Music with *Late Junction*. I am not against either of these, but they are either at the wrong time or on the wrong station.

*Brian Caplen, London*

## FUN WITH PODGER

Tamsin Waley-Cohen (December) says that classical violinists should learn to have more fun with what they're doing. Your December CD offers the perfect example. I was at the Cadogan Hall Prom featured on the disc and listeners may wonder why the audience was laughing during the last piece. In this, the two violins represent the sanguine (cheerful) and melancholy temperaments. In a wonderful display of acting, Rachel Podger (sanguine) tiptoed toward Bojan Čičić (melancholy), entreating him to cheer up! In fact, throughout the whole concert she didn't just play the violin but conveyed by movement and facial expression all the joy, sorrow and humour in CPE Bach's music. Thank you Rachel and friends. I shall cherish the CD as a memory of an uplifting (and, at times, even funny!) experience.

*Colin Scofield, Truro*

## AMERICAN SCHAFER?

I enjoyed Jeremy Pound's article 'Wild at Heart' (November) very much but was distressed to see R Murray Schafer described as a 'US composer'. R Murray Schafer is Canadian through and through. It would be hard to



name a composer more grounded in, and central to, Canadian artistic experience. A common global perception of Canadians is that they are not very good at blowing their own trumpets. It's too bad that *BBC Music Magazine* failed to blow in tune for one of Canada's most distinguished and beloved composers of the 20th and 21st centuries.

*Diana Woolrich, Saskatchewan, Canada*

## CANADIAN GREATS

What a delight to see not one, but two fine Canadian pianists featured in your November issue: Janina Fialkowska and Angela Hewitt. These two musicians are representative of a strong tradition of excellent Canadian pianists, including such well-known artists as Glenn Gould, Louis Lortie and Jon Kimura Parker, to name but a few. Your readers might like to become acquainted with David Jalbert, another superb Canadian pianist. David Jalbert has recorded several discs for the ATMA label, including a lovely rendition of the 24 Preludes and Fugues by Shostakovich. Definitely worth hearing! *Susan Morris, Ontario, Canada*

**THE EDITOR REPLIES:** Here, at least, we are pleased to have blown the trumpet for Canadian musicians (see above)! But no list of brilliant Canadian pianists could surely be complete without the incomparable Marc-André Hamelin and the exceptional 19-year-old Jan Lisiecki...?

## NOT KIRILL

Your stimulating November feature on the symphonies of Shostakovich was illustrated by a photograph showing the composer being kissed by a man at the premiere of his Symphony No. 13, identified in the caption as the conductor Kirill Kondrashin. Actually it is the poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko, whose lines help make Shostakovich's 13th so devastating.

*J William Myers, Tennessee, US*

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Rebecca O'Connell +44 (0)117 933 8007  
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Isabel Higuero +44 (0)117 314 8754  
**Brand sales executive**  
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**Inserts** Laurence Robertson  
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Richard Bentley +44 (0)20 7150 5168

### PRODUCTION

**Production director** Sarah Powell  
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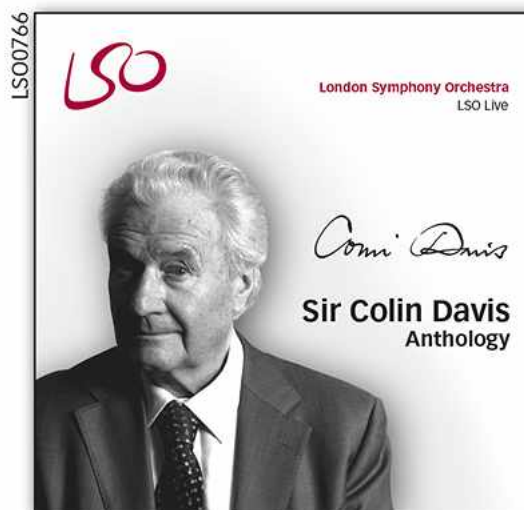
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# music

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MAGAZINE



# The Full Score

OUR PICK OF THE MONTH'S NEWS, VIEWS AND INTERVIEWS

## High notes reached by Paish and King

*Singers from Devon and Guildford enjoy success at the 2014 Young Choristers of the Year final*



**TOP CHORISTERS:**  
Helena Paish and  
Tom King celebrate at  
St Paul's Cathedral

It's going to be a very jolly Christmas in the King and Paish households. And, one presumes, a musical one too, as Tom King, 13, and Helena Paish, 12, have been named the winners of BBC Radio 2's Young Choristers of the Year 2014 competition, adding their names to the honours board of a prestigious competition that dates back to 1975.

In the final, held at St Paul's Cathedral, Tom King sang his way to victory with Bach's 'Bist du bei mir' and the hymn 'Christ Triumphant'. A chorister at Guildford Cathedral since he was seven, King celebrated his 13th birthday on the day of the Young Chorister broadcast itself. 'I really enjoy singing, but it's hard to say exactly why,' he tells *BBC Music*

*Magazine*. 'Maybe it's because it's nice to show off – a bit like acting, showing different emotions. I would like to carry on singing when I'm older, but rather than staying with classical, I would possibly like to go into musical theatre or maybe some pop singing – a bit of variety, to see what I like!'

Helena Paish, who sings at Crediton Parish Church in Devon, performed *Mary's Cradle Song* and 'As the deer pants', a combination that impressed a jury chaired by Andrew Carwood, director of music of St Paul's itself. 'I had already sung *Mary's Cradle Song* for one of my Grade Exams,' she says. 'It's a lovely piece and really peaceful. What I like about singing is that I don't have to think about

anything else that is going on – I just sing. I definitely want to be a singer when I'm older, but I don't know what kind yet, as my voice hasn't really developed.'

The Young Chorister broadcast was the culmination of a competition that began back in July, when hundreds of singers between the ages of 11 and 17 were invited to submit recordings of themselves. From those, eight choristers – four boys and four girls – were selected for the final. It was a particularly big night for Guildford Cathedral which was also represented by Elizabeth Robbins in the girls' final.

### Chorally competitive



**2011 JOY:** Richard Decker, Ella Rainbird-Earley

The Young Choristers of the Year competition was initially launched by the Royal School of Church Music as Choirboy of the Year in 1975. To bring a little gender balance, the BBC began a separate Choirgirl of the Year in 1986... only for the RSCM to admit girls into its competition three years later. The Radio 2 competition in its current combined format, with one boy and one girl winner, began in 1998.



# Ulster Orchestra stares into the abyss

*Northern Ireland ensemble makes urgent bid for council funding as future looks bleak*

The Ulster Orchestra has warned that it may be on the brink of closure. The ensemble, which is Northern Ireland's only professional symphony orchestra, has been struggling to make ends meet following a 28 per cent cut in its public funding over the last four years. Now it has asked Belfast City Council to provide £500,000 to cover its predicted deficit for the 2014/5 season and also to allow it to use Ulster Hall rent-free for the next five years. If funding is not secured, says the orchestra, it may have played its final chord before 2014 is even out.

At the time of writing, the council had yet to give a definite response to the requests, saying only that it needed to see the orchestra's business plan before it could make any offer of help; in the meantime, some councillors have called for greater assistance from private donors and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Should the Ulster Orchestra have to call it a day, it would mark not just a major setback for the cultural life of



**HAPPIER TIMES:**  
JoAnn Falletta conducts  
the Ulster Orchestra at  
the 2012 BBC Proms

Northern Ireland but also the end of an ensemble with a noble past. Founded in 1966, its former principal conductors have included Bryden Thomson, Vernon Handley and, most recently, JoAnn

Falletta, and in the course of its 48-year history it has made a number of important recordings, not least of works by Irish and Irish-influenced composers such as Moeran, Stanford and Bax.

## RISING STAR Great artists of tomorrow

### Aida Garifullina Soprano

It's not every day that a young soprano is personally invited by conductor Valery Gergiev to make a debut at the Mariinsky Opera. But that's exactly what happened to Aida Garifullina after she met him in London.

'I waited in line to ask him if I could sing for him and he said yes,' Garifullina explains. 'I sang "Je veux vivre" from Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet* and he said, "You could make a good Susanna". One week later I got a call from the Mariinsky Theatre inviting me to play Susanna in Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*!'

After that Mariinsky debut, Garifullina went on to win First Prize in Plácido Domingo's Operalia 2013 competition, which in turn has led to a two-year contract at Vienna State Opera, where upcoming roles include Adina in Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore* and Musetta in Puccini's *La bohème*. 'Because I greatly admired

the voices of the other participants and felt that my performances were far from perfect, winning didn't sink in for a long time,' she reflects modestly about her Operalia success. 'But I delivered each aria with my heart and soul, and maybe that was what touched the jury.'

Garifullina doesn't remember a time when she didn't want to be a singer. 'Throughout my childhood I was surrounded by music.

My mother is a choral conductor, so she took me to lots of rehearsals and concerts when I was young. At five years old I sang in my first TV contest for young singers in Moscow.'

Her mother remains a huge inspiration to this day. 'When I was a little girl, she always believed in me and travelled all over the world to support me in masterclasses and competitions. She was the person who persuaded me to take part in Operalia.'

As well as the opera stage, the concert hall also features regularly in Garifullina's diary, and London audiences will have the chance to hear her when she makes her UK recital debut at

**'I waited in line to ask  
Valery Gergiev if  
I could sing for him'**



**MARIINSKY MARRIAGE:**  
Garifullina made her  
debut in Mozart's *Figaro*

Wigmore Hall this month. In the meantime, she says, there's still plenty to learn. 'I'm proud that I have learnt how to work hard. I try every day to improve, both as a singer and as an actress.'

*Interview by Rosie Pentreath*  
Aida Garifullina sings in a Rosenblatt Recital at Wigmore Hall on Wednesday, 3 December



## THE OFFICIAL CLASSICAL CHART

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### 3 Stella di Napoli

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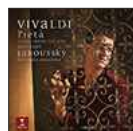


★ NEW

### 6 The Mozart Album

Lang Lang (piano); Vienna Philharmonic/Nikolaus Harnoncourt Sony Classical 88843082522

The famously brash pianist reveals his gentler side falling, as he says, in love again with Mozart



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### 7 Vivaldi Sacred works for alto

Philippe Jaroussky (countertenor); Ensemble Artaserse Erato 2564625810

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Grigory Sokolov

## Sokolov signs to DG

Grigory Sokolov, one of the world's most reclusive pianists, has signed to Deutsche Grammophon. But don't expect a flurry of studio albums from the 64-year-old Russian: Sokolov has made no secret of his dislike of the studio, and his future discs will all be from live concerts. The first release, in January 2015, features music by Mozart and Chopin, recorded at the 2008 Salzburg Festival. It will also be a unique chance for UK listeners to hear Sokolov in the country – albeit on hi-fi – as he has refused to travel here in recent years after stricter visa regulations came into force.

## Hasse revived

Hasse's opera *Siroe re di Persia* has been recorded complete for the first time. The German composer wrote the work in 1733 for a theatre in Bologna, but 30 years later decided to reset Metastasio's libretto. Hasse ran out of time, leaving the work partially rewritten and revised; but its premiere on the name day of Hasse's employer Elector Frederick Augustus II of Saxony was a success. After his death, Hasse's music fell into obscurity, and *Siroe* languished unheard until its modern revival in 2008. It's now been recorded by George Petrou and Armonia Atenea, with a cast headed up by countertenor Max Emanuel Cenčić, for Decca.

## Christmas gifts

On p62, our critic Terry Blain rounds up some of this Christmas's best new recordings. Sadly not all of the festive CDs arrived in time, so here are a few more you might want to add to your wish list. Soprano Renée Fleming is joined by Wynton Marsalis, Brad Mehldau and others for 'Christmas in New York' (Decca), while closer to home Tewkesbury Abbey Schola Cantorum sings traditional carols for 'Christmas from Tewkesbury' (Regent) and Christ Church



Cathedral Choir tackles Byrd, Taverner and Palestrina on 'Christmas Music' (Nimbus). Swedish soprano Susanna Andersson

joins the Little Venice Ensemble for 'Deck the Halls' (Stone Records), and the RIAS Kammerchor explores its archives for 'Stille Nacht' on Audite. For an alternative to Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*, the Kölner Akademie has recorded cantatas by the composer's pupil Johann Agricola (CPO).



## REWIND Artists talk about their past recordings...



### THIS MONTH MARTIN BAKER

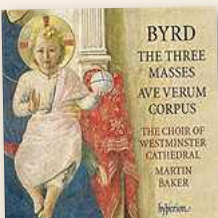
Master of Music at Westminster Cathedral since 2000, Martin Baker has worked at Westminster Abbey and St Paul's Cathedral as an organist as well as a choral conductor. His recording of Byrd Masses with Westminster Cathedral Choir was BBC Music's Choral & Song choice last issue.

#### My finest moment

**Byrd Masses for three, four and five voices**  
Westminster Cathedral Choir/Martin Baker  
Hyperion CDA 68038 (2014)

I like to think that there is no more powerful drug than the experience of standing as conductor in front of Westminster Cathedral Choir in the apse during Mass, raising one's hands in the incense-filled silence, surrounded by beams of sunlight cutting through the smoke, and hearing the sound of the trebles emerge, quietly at first, but

growing and subsiding organically, resonating and propagating in endless lines down the building. This is a choir with tremendous depth of sound, infinite malleability, a magical spontaneity and a profound connection with the polyphony and chant it sings daily. It is this spirit which Adrian Peacock and David Hinitt, Hyperion's production team, has captured in the choir's recent release of the Byrd Masses. This is no academic document but a testament to the way the choir lives and breathes this music in its intended context.



#### My fondest memory

**MacMillan Tenebrae Responsories & other choral works**

Peter Stevens (organ); Westminster Cathedral Choir;

London Brass/Martin Baker

Hyperion CDA 67970 (2013)

Pope Benedict's visit to Westminster Cathedral is the liturgical highlight of my time here, and the part of the liturgy which seems particularly to have captivated everyone present (or watching on TV) is the *Introit, Tu es Petrus*, specially commissioned from James MacMillan for the occasion. It was something of a last-minute inspiration, designed to fill a gap between a processional hymn and the Gregorian introit. Discussing it with MacMillan, we hit on the idea of enveloping the cathedral in sound from every direction at once: the Choir from the East, the Grand Organ from the West, a wall of brass to the North and a battery of percussion to the South. The effect in the building was cataclysmic – Pope Benedict was visibly moved – and once again Adrian and David from Hyperion have brilliantly recreated this moment with incredible clarity and vitality on CD.

#### I'd like another go at...

**Victoria Missa Ave Regina caelorum and other choral works**

Westminster Cathedral Choir/Baker  
Hyperion CDA 67479 (2004)

When recording, the goal is usually perfection, but how much is lost in this search? Here, inspired by the sound of the choir under George Malcolm in the 1950s and especially his Victoria



*Tenebrae Responsories*, I encouraged really vibrant but sometimes uncontrolled singing from the choir. In throwing aside caution and going for a more 'live' feel, while it may work on first hearing,

with repeated listening the ear usually tires of the idiosyncrasies. This, for me, is the paradox of recording: how to stop it from being bland, yet not offend. In recent years I've focused on trying to maintain a really interesting timbre but within more strictly defined parameters. I've avoided relying on the sheer thrill of producing uninhibited sound, which this choir wants naturally to do. But I do envy the courage of Malcolm, who shrugged at convention and produced some of the most inspiring and daring choral performances ever recorded.

## STUDIOSECRETS

We reveal who's recording what, and where



**OCCUPIED:** violinist Tamsin Waley-Cohen

Violinist **Tamsin Waley-Cohen** has been busy. As a new member of the London Bridge Ensemble, she has recorded Dvořák's piano quartets for Champs Hill, while for Signum she has turned to solo repertoire by Bartók, Penderecki, Carter and Kurtág.

St Augustine's in Kilburn has hosted a recording of Purcell's *Dido & Aeneas*, made by the **Armonico Consort** with soprano Elin Manahan Thomas and mezzo Rachael Lloyd. The period instrument group has previously recorded the composer's Shakespeare-inspired opera *The Fairy Queen*. It'll be released on Signum.

It's the 100th anniversary of Scriabin's death in 2015. To mark the occasion, **Vladimir Ashkenazy** has been recording an all-Scriabin recital at Pottton Hall for Decca which will feature both early and late piano works by the Russian composer.

**Rachel Podger**, who featured on last month's cover CD, has recorded Vivaldi's *L'estro armonico*. The violinist recorded the first six of the group of 12 concertos in February this year, completing the set in September. She recorded it with her group Brecon Baroque in St John the Evangelist, Upper Norwood, for Channel Classics.

After recording Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, **Nick van Bloss** has now turned to Beethoven's gargantuan piano variation set – the *Diabelli Variations*. The British pianist recorded the piece in Wyastone Hall for Nimbus, along with Beethoven's *Appassionata* Sonata.



## #51 CAROL

CHRISTMAS HAS CHANGED immensely over the centuries. Between the sybaritic (or, depending on your point of view, penitential) excesses of the modern family Christmas and the original, probably dauntingly austere Mass for the Nativity, we have a veritable carousel of chalk and cheese. After the communal saturnalia-like celebrations of the Middle Ages come the extreme clampdowns of post-Reformation Puritanism, under which Christmas either disappears or goes underground. It wasn't until the Victorians got hold of the idea that something like 'our' Christmas starts to emerge, and that what we tend to call Christmas carols started to be heard again – or just heard, as some of these 'traditional' offerings turn out to have dubious pedigrees.

The original French word 'carole' signifies a round-dance, and at least some medieval British carols seem to have been just that. Immediately, Holst's lovely arrangement of 'Tomorrow shall be my dancing day' comes trippingly to mind, as though in vindication – the trouble is that the first recorded

## DISCOVERING MUSIC

*Stephen Johnson gets to grips with classical music's technical terms*



appearance of the tune itself is in William Sandys's *Christmas Carols Ancient and Modern*, published in 1833, in which 'I saw three ships', 'The First Noel' and 'God rest ye merry, gentlemen' (note the crucial comma!) also make their debuts on paper. The words have more or less traceable lineages, but the provenance of

the tunes is anyone's guess. And however much we may like to imagine Hardy's musical rustics putting their souls into these notionally ancient numbers in *Under the Greenwood Tree*, the kind of thing they sang was probably what was then regarded as traditional: metrical psalms and robust evangelical hymns. It was only with the publication of the *Oxford Book of Carols* in 1926 that what we more plausibly think of as 'traditional' (ie centuries old) carols began to enter the national bloodstream and the modern 'carol service' was born.

So, once again, something we think of as reassuringly ancient, continuous, enduring 'change and decay', turns out to have been at least partly concocted in living memory. As today's Christmas degenerates into a midwinter tat-fest, and as 1950s sort-of-Christmas-themed pop songs edge out the trad stuff from retail outlets, I suppose one should take the long view and chant 'che sera, sera' until it all passes. But I can't. I don't care that the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols is under a century old. It still embodies something 'Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer' doesn't, and we lose it at our peril.

## Wexford's grand National



ONE FOR ALL: Ireland's National Opera House

Ireland has become the proud owner of a National Opera House. At a recent ceremony, accompanied by fireworks galore, minister for the arts Heather Humphreys revealed that Wexford Opera House has been renamed and elevated to nationwide status – until now, Ireland had been unique in the European Union in not having a national centre for opera. Situated 80 miles south of Dublin, the venue is home to the internationally famous Wexford Festival Opera, which has taken place in the city for 12 days each autumn since 1951. In comparison to the festival, the opera house is a mere youngster, having opened its doors as recently as September 2008.

GETTY ILLUSTRATION: ADAM HOWLING

## APP REVIEW

Every issue we explore a recent digital product



### In C App Free

Terry Riley's seminal minimalist piece *In C* promotes simplicity, interactivity and democracy in music-making. Constructed from 53 short fragments of melody, the work invites any number of performers to play each one consecutively any number of times (and on any instrument, in any

register and at any dynamic). To mark the work's 50th anniversary, Concertgebouw Brugge and app producers ChampdAction have launched an *In C App* that allows you to 'play' *In C* with users all over the world and on any online device. The idea *per se* makes a lot of sense – you can select which instruments you play and there is an instant messaging facility to promote interaction – but there are drawbacks. Once a session has started you have to join in

the middle, and the sounds are streamed from a separate app, Mixlr, which is embedded into the webpage and is slow to load. It's fun, but fans of Riley's piece may prefer composer Matt Ingalls's more compact *In C Performer* app which is designed specially for smartphone or tablet. *Rosie Pentreath* ★★

## Bach where she belongs

There is JS, of course, and then CPE, JC and WF... But what about AM Bach? In a new documentary, *Written by Mrs Bach*, a team of musicologists and handwriting experts have proposed that Anna Magdalena, JS Bach's second wife, might have been the real composer of some of his most famous works, including the Cello Suites. Led by Professor Martin Jarvis, the team reasons that, while it is well known that Anna Magdalena (below, playing to JS) was employed as a copyist by her husband, the hesitant style of some of her writing suggests that the creative cogs may have also been whirring. All very well, reply some critics, but with her busy household, would Mrs B really have found the time to compose? Well, there was nothing preventing JS changing a nappy or two...



## TWITTER ROOM

Who's saying what on the micro-blogging site



**@Flutelicious** Due to the cat bringing in a frog which freaked out the dog at 4am, I'm not at my best. Normal service should be resumed by 7.30

Ouch. A disastrous mog-frog-dog combination leaves LSO flautist Gareth Davies (left) feeling a little flat

**@susantomespiano** A student pianist friend was hired to play a concert where she was told to move the grand piano out of a storeroom and back again afterwards. Pianist Susan Tomes relates a concert horror story. We suspect this never happens to Martha Argerich...

**@joestilgoe** Having my eeyes testef for the first time in 15 years. I sill don't think there as anyrhunh qronn with then. For jazz singer and composer Joe Stilgoe, life is just a blur

**@JRhodesPianist** The moment when, after maybe 100 hours of graft, you close the score & play a piece from memory for the 1st time & know it's 'there'. ahhhh.

A satisfying moment for pianist James Rhodes. We're not told what the piece in question is...

**@ed\_lyon** Will somebody please buy my flat for the asking price ASAP.

Tenor Ed Lyon (right) comes straight to the point



## Notes from the piano stool

David Owen Norris



I took my Broadwood piano to the Holywell Music Room for the Oxford Lieder Festival. The festival programme? Every single one of Schubert's songs! (Discuss.) Our bit was his first approach to a song-cycle, the *Kosegarten Liederspiel* of 1815, works identified in 1996 by musicologist Morten Solvik, who discovered that the manuscripts of the songs had numbers pencilled on the back.

They were no longer in numerical order

– Solvik suspects that someone simply dropped them, and gathered them up any old how – and they were published piecemeal. But when they're put in the right order, they tell a tale of love and loss. You need one tenor – the faithless Wilhelm, who gets his come-uppance when *all* his ladies forsake him – and then a minimum of two women to impersonate poor Ida, Elwina, Luisa, a couple of anonymous conquests and the canny Rosa, who gets out in time. It works like a charade, the listeners guessing The Word. Cad, probably.

The Holywell brings back memories. The earliest recording I have of my own playing is of the Liszt Sonata on the then-resident Bösendorfer Imperial; and a year later, the quadrophonic pioneer Michael Gerzon

## Saint-Saëns can provide both swans and calling-birds. He could furnish French hens as well, I suppose

recorded a performance of the Brahms Clarinet Trio, in which Andrew Lyle, Sara Gilford and I can be heard in the confidence of youth.

And it was in the Holywell that I first met tenor Ian Partridge, at John Bridcut's Festival of English Song. I always envy Ian about this time of year: his Christmas cards are unmistakable. While I'm wondering about robins and carol-singers, Ian rings the changes on pear trees – I don't think he's ever sent the same one twice.

The Twelve Days of Christmas. You could make up a musical bouquet. 'Far I hear the steady drummer,' sings Housman. Quilter's *Charlie is my darling* is all bagpipes, as is Britten's *Bonnie Earl o' Moray*. Jane Austen danced *The Fairy Dance* by Holst's great-granddad. Grainger made a marvellous arrangement of *The pretty maid milkin' her cow*. Saint-Saëns can provide both swans and calling-birds. He could furnish French hens as well, I suppose, but I prefer a pun on Poulenc – the late Richard Briers's *Babar* would be a Christmas treat indeed. You might find geese *At a country fair* – a piano piece by Roger Quilter. To avoid the obvious Wagner, we might turn to Storace's *The Curfew tolls the knell of parting day* for our 'rings'. With Jonathan Dove's *Five Am'rous Sighs*, we can complete the set with Ian Partridge's recording of the Kosegarten songs. Good parlour game for Boxing Day, this.

I can't think *why* I've chosen those particular pieces. Can you? Happy Christmas! ■

David Owen Norris is a pianist, composer and radio presenter



## MUSIC TO MY EARS

*What the classical world has been listening to this month*

### GRACE DAVIDSON *soprano*



I can't get enough of my recording of **Handel's** motet *Silete Venti*, performed by soprano Sylvia McNair with the English Baroque Soloists under John Eliot Gardiner. I play it all the time. The orchestral playing is impeccable – it just buzzes and is really satisfying to listen to – while McNair's singing is so natural, and extremely moving. McNair is an extremely versatile singer whose phrasing is always stylish. Her control over her top notes, meanwhile, is exquisite.

■ As a singer I tend to listen predominantly to vocal works. I have a beautiful

recording of **Vaughan Williams's** arrangement of a gorgeous folk song called *Purple Dove*, sung by the baritone Gabriel Crouch with a choir humming a refrain in the background. This is the sort of disc I can put on in the car and my children will enjoy it too. Crouch sings it beautifully. It's very emotive and he conveys the solo line's natural, simple texts with such flawless musicality and tuning.

■ I'm not that familiar with the music of **Richard Strauss**, as it's not something I tend to sing myself, but I do love the various songs that I know. I was recently listening to *Morgen*, sung by soprano Christine Schäfer with the Berlin Philharmonic under Claudio Abbado, and it grabbed my attention.



Schäfer has a lighter voice than you might expect in this repertoire, but her overall control and shape, combined with her expression of the text, is really lovely.

■ Rather than just listen to *Carols from King's* every

Christmas, I like to put on a recording by a Swedish close-harmony ensemble called **The Real Group**. They sing in an immaculate, very close-miked way, which on disc is absolutely beautiful. They have some lovely arrangements of some quite traditional Swedish carols, but best of all for me is their rendition of 'Es ist ein Ros entsprungen', which is gorgeous. I highly recommend looking them up on YouTube! *Grace Davidson sings with Ensemble Plus Ultra at St John's Smith Square on 20 December.*

### OUR CHOICES

*The BBC Music team's current favourites*



**Oliver Condy**  
Editor

Outside his masterful oratorio *Elijah*

and anthem *Hear my prayer*, **Mendelssohn's** choral output is underappreciated. So this Christmas, have a listen to the stirring *Sechs Sprüche für das Kirchenjahr* (Six Maxims for the Church Year) for unaccompanied choir. Each 'Maxim' – setting texts for Christmas, New Year's Day, Ascension, Passiontide, Advent and Good Friday – features fluid, stunningly wrought choral textures.



**Jeremy Pound**  
Deputy editor

Having recently moved house,

I now harbour this quaint image of sitting happily with the family in front of our log fire on Christmas Eve, glass of red in hand, cat on lap and listening to the sublime *Christmas with the Tallis Scholars* collection. For **Victoria's** Ave Maria, conversation will pause as we collectively enjoy this moment of festive choral perfection. Sheer heaven. And utterly unlikely...



**Rebecca Franks**  
Reviews editor

I discovered the music of **Bernat**

**Vivancos** last year, when the Latvian Radio Choir recorded a fresh album of his choral works. *Blanc* showcases this Catalan composer's keen sense of atmosphere and his imaginative writing. I've recently revisited it, particularly enjoying the bell-filled *Messe aux sons des cloches*, the seasonal *A Child is Born* and haunting *Le cri des bergers*.

### EDWARD WICKHAM *conductor*



Hearing **Dowland** performed by Anthony Rooley and Emma Kirkby on Radio 3 recently inspired me to dig out a recording I used to play all the time when I was a student:

Dowland's *A Pilgrimes Solace* performed by Kirkby and The Consort of Musicke under Rooley. If I were to pick out one track it would be 'Tell me, true love', which Kirkby sings exquisitely. It reminds me of my student days so it's very nostalgic to hear it again.

■ Recently I've been listening to the Edinburgh Quartet's recording of **Mátyás Seiber's** String Quartets and in particular the Third String Quartet, which is brilliant. If you like the string quartets of Bartók, I really recommend it. I recently became friends with Seiber's daughter, Julia Seiber Boyd, who's become a great advocate of her father's music. I only knew the choral music before and it's been great to get to know some of the instrumental works.

■ I have to admit that a lot of my listening happens when I'm in the car, and often with my daughter. The piece that we come back to over and over again is **The Wombles'** (below) version of Grieg's 'In the Hall of the Mountain King', which is called 'Hall of



UNDERGROUND, OVERGROUND: the Wombles play Grieg





the Mountain Womble'. It's Mike Batt's arrangement with electric guitars and Womble voices interpolated into it. The punchline after the big climax in the music is a little voice saying 'Get that orchestra off my mountain!' which makes us laugh every time!

■ My friend **Christopher Fox** is a witty and versatile composer and his *Merzsonata* is a piece of performance poetry. It is Dadaist poetry set to a rhythm and the soundscape includes dogs barking and original recordings of Kurt Schwitters, the performance poet who inspired the work. A fantastic discovery, it's absolutely unique and highly amusing. **Edward Wickham** conducts *The Clerks* in 'Phantom Voices' at *Spitalfields Winter Festival* on 15 December

## THE TRAFALGAR SQUARE CHRISTMAS TREE

Norway spruce



As a Norway spruce, who else could be top of my listening list than the mighty **Grieg**? His Christmas works are relatively few and far between, but well worth a try. His *Ave Maris*

*Stella* is a lovely work for choir, with some gorgeous harmonies, but for some reason it's his splendid song, *The Green, Charming Tree* that really gets my baubles sparkling. I would recommend Die Singphoniker's excellent recording.

■ Every December, **various choirs** from across the land come to serenade me with a carol or two. This year you can hear them every afternoon from 8 to 23 December, and jolly pleasant it is too. Those

## OUR CHOICES

The BBC Music team's current favourites



**Neil McKim**  
Production editor

I used to enjoy going to hear

**Handel's** *Messiah* at Bath Abbey when trumpeter David Mason (of Beatles *Penny Lane* fame) would perform. A highlight was 'The Trumpet Shall Sound' played on his piccolo trumpet. I've been getting in the festive mood by listening to William Christie's glorious version with Les Arts Florissants, with James Ghigi on his valveless Baroque instrument.



**Rosie Rentreath**  
Staff writer

During some pre-Christmas

tidying, I spotted a CD of choral works by Finnish composer **Rautavaara** on the Ondine label. His music is quite stark but very powerful. Highlights include the exquisite *Canticum Mariae Virginis* and *Joulun virsi* (Christmas hymn). The set also treats us to his orchestral choral works, including *On the Last Frontier*, with its breathtaking range of colours.

who think that I might be flattered by renditions of *O Tannenbaum* (O Christmas Tree) are wide of the mark, however. Much as I appreciate the references to lovely branches, 'Tannenbaum' is in fact the German for a fir tree, a species that is in every way

**ANIMAL MAGIC:**  
what would a Trafalgar Square lion listen to?



inferior to the glorious spruce. ■ From my position in Trafalgar Square, I enjoy an unrivalled view of the church of St Martin-in-the-Fields, home of the wonderful Academy. To hear my local ensemble on fine festive form, I turn to their dazzling 1976 recording of **Bach's** *Christmas*

*Oratorio*, where they are joined by the Choir of King's College, Cambridge. The line-up of soloists – including mezzo Janet Baker and baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau – is almost as lofty and starry as I am.

■ Finally, I do enjoy a musical discussion with my fellow Trafalgar Square denizens. The chap in the hat at the top of the column is a big fan of Haydn's *Nelson Mass*, of course, while his furry friends at the bottom of it (pictured above) lean towards the 'Royal March of the Lion' from Saint-Saëns's *Carnival of the Animals*. As for myself, I do enjoy the **Beatles** from time to time. And my favourite song? Well, that would have to be 'Norwegian Wood'...

## AND MUSIC TO YOUR EARS...

You tell us what you've been enjoying on disc and in the concert hall



**Peter Phillips**

**Swansea**  
I recently completed a PhD and one piece more than any other accompanied me

through the highs and lows of the final stressful months. It was **Mozart's** *Sinfonia Concertante* for Violin and Viola, performed by Rafael Druian and Abraham Skernick, both principals in George Szell's Cleveland Orchestra in the early 1960s. The performance is both brisk and passionate with a strong sense of known and trusted colleagues making music together. Its combination of energy and humanity carried me through.



**Francesca Santoro**  
**L'hoir California, US**

On opening the glove box in my car, I discovered a CD that's

been hiding in there for several years. It was **Berlioz's** *Requiem*, performed by Charles Munch with the Boston Symphony. It's an old record, in mono, but what glorious music. The opening chorus is sublime, as is the tenor singing in the Sanctus and the magnificent double chorus of 'Hosanna in excelsis'. I was profoundly moved and got to thinking that Berlioz is one of the most underrated composers of the 19th century.



**David Pulsford**  
**Torquay**

**Viktor Kosenko's** *Eleven Etudes in the Form of Old Dances*, played on

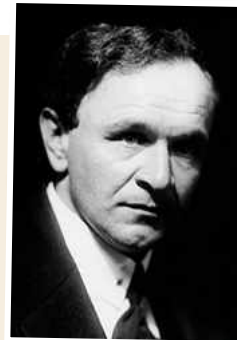
the piano by Natalya Shkoda, is a gem. Kosenko (above, right) was a Ukrainian composer born in 1896 and his music is romantic, melodic and, for me at least, endlessly interesting. I have

to agree with the disc's programme notes when they describe these pieces as 'a neglected monument in the piano literature', and if you love rich and lyrical, slightly folk-inflected piano music, I would recommend them.



**Art Roest**  
**Hoom, Holland**

I've been listening to the Mahler orchestration of **Beethoven's** String Quartet in F minor, Op. 95 as played by Kammerorchester Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach directed by Hartmut Haenchen. It is beautiful playing of music with just a little more depth or contrast than in the original string quartet. The music does not pass by too quickly, which I like, as the beautifully crafted tone



rises towards a beautiful climax. Everything is there to be enjoyed...



**Tim McCracken**  
**New Jersey, US**

After rereading Ian McEwan's novel *Amsterdam* which is, in part, about a fictional composer who 'regarded

himself as **Vaughan Williams's** heir', I returned to VW's Fifth Symphony. It is one of my favourite symphonies of all time. I love Adrian Boult's version (EMI) as it was my first recording, and also Richard Hickox's (Chandos) for its sonic splendour. I am always moved by the third movement, which reminds me of TS Eliot's line, 'still and still moving'.

Tell us what concerts or recordings you've been enjoying by emailing us at [musictomyears@classical-music.com](mailto:musictomyears@classical-music.com)



## NEWSINBRIEF

**ENIGMATIC:**  
Elgar pops up  
in Worcester



### SEE PICTURES

Two men from Malvern have apologised for adorning a wall and a bus stop in Worcester with four paintings of Elgar without seeking permission first. One of the images, in which the composer is seen holding a mobile phone, initially raised speculation that it might have been by Banksy, the iconic Bristol artist. Residents have asked that the pictures should be allowed to stay.

### SUZUKI SHOCK

Did Shinichi Suzuki, the Japanese violin teacher whose Suzuki Method is studied by millions worldwide, build his career (and fortune) on a series of lies? Shockingly, yes, claims violinist Mark O'Connor who, having looked into Suzuki's background, says that Suzuki neither studied at the Berlin Hochschule, as is believed, nor was he ever a friend of Einstein. Suzuki devotees have reacted angrily.

### STRING SINGER

One string player whose background is definitely not made up is violist Adrien Boisseau, who has recently joined the acclaimed Ebène Quartet, replacing Mathieu Herzog. Given that the Ebènes regularly like to sing their encores, we trust Boisseau is also blessed with a good voice.

### BBC SYMPHONY OZ

Another violist going places is Brett Dean. The Australian, an acclaimed composer and conductor, has been named as the new artist in association of the BBC Symphony Orchestra. The position, which runs until 2017, will see the orchestra performing a number of Dean's compositions over the next three years.

## Mozart scores a winner

*Tottenham Hotspur boss praises pitch perfection*

Football managers and classical music are not two concepts that one instantly links in the mind – England's Roy Hodgson is an opera fan, we believe, but that's about it. And so it was with no little delight when we heard Tottenham manager

Mauricio Pochettino recently describe watching Sergio Aguero play as being 'like classical music in my head'. And not just any classical music. When invited to take his comparison a little further, the Spurs boss explained that the Manchester City forward is 'like Mozart. Seriously. It is positive. Beethoven is too crazy.' So, we ask, might this herald the era of musical football analysis? Will we hear, say, a Steven Gerard pass described as 'pure Brahms', a Lionel Messi turn touted as 'Bachian' or learn that the Arsenal defence has again collapsed 'like a Puccini soprano'? Here's hoping...



## AFTER HOURS

**Musicians and their hobbies**

**LAWRENCE GOLAN**

*Conductor*

### SKIING

I moved to Denver 14 years ago to take up a position at the University of Denver, conducting their orchestra and opera programme, and in my first year there, I went skiing 13 times! From Denver, you're only one hour away from several major ski resorts, so you can just go for a day trip. I can't go as often now because of my schedule, but I try and set aside two blocks or four or five days each a year. Skiing is a great chance to catch up with friends and I often ski with my best buddy from Chicago.

When I first moved out here, I considered myself a lower-intermediate skier but, like everything, practice makes perfect and I like to think of myself as advanced – I can go down black diamond runs relatively easily. The double black diamonds, which are marked



**ON THE PISTE:**  
Golan (centre)  
and chums

with a skull and crossbones, I can get down alive, although I must admit that all grace is thrown out the window. I don't look pretty coming down those runs, but, as I say, I can get down alive! Survival is the key.



## Farewell to...



**SHORE SUCCESS:**  
Acker Bilk was in the  
charts for 50 weeks

### ACKER BILK *Born 1929 Clarinetist*

In 1960, Acker Bilk recorded 'Stranger on the Shore', a gently lilting piece intended to be used as the theme tune for a children's TV series of the same name. Two years later, the piece had made history, reaching No. 1 in the US charts and No. 2 in the UK charts, where it stayed in the Top 30 for more than 50 weeks. It remains the biggest-selling instrumental single of all time and, while in 2012 Bilk said he was 'fed up' with playing it, he did also recognise its exceptional success by regularly referring to it as 'my old age pension'. Born in Somerset, Bilk's various boyhood antics saw him lose his two front teeth and the top of one finger – injuries that, he said, later influenced his playing style. He took up the clarinet while on National Service in the late 1940s, and by 1956 had formed his Paramount Jazz Band. Instantly recognizable in their waistcoats and bowler hats, the band specialised in trad jazz, which was enjoying a boom in popularity. Trad-based albums such as *Sheer Magic* and *Evergreen* proved especially successful, but Bilk was not averse to widening his horizons, going on to perform with more experimental musicians such as the pianist Stan Tracey and trumpeter Kenny Wheeler. Bilk carried on performing right until his eighties, his bowler-hatted renditions of 'Stranger on the Shore' always guaranteed to bring the house down.

## Also remembered...

**David Trendell** (b1964) enjoyed respect as both a choral conductor and musicologist, specialising particularly in the music of the Renaissance period. As director of music at King's College, London, he transformed the chapel choir into a highly polished outfit, conducting it in a number of acclaimed, and always immaculately researched, recordings for the Hyperion and Delphian labels.

The music of French composer **Hugues Le Bars** (b1950) became familiar to both theatre and cinema-goers thanks to his work on films such as *Les Côtélettes* (1997) and his long-term collaboration with ballet choreographer Maurice Béjart, for whom he wrote nine scores in all. Le Bars also composed a number of pieces to accompany stories for children.

# Les Arts Florissants

WILLIAM CHRISTIE

## ÉDITIONS

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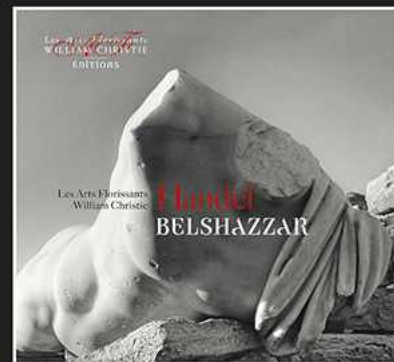
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Soloists: Allan Clayton  
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\*\*\*\*\*

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of the singers."  
BBC Music Magazine

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Including a short story by  
RENÉ DE CECCATTY

OCTOBER 2014

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#### HANDEL MUSIC FOR QUEEN CAROLINE

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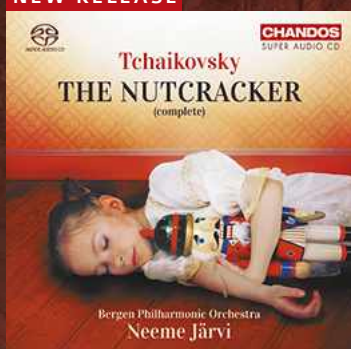




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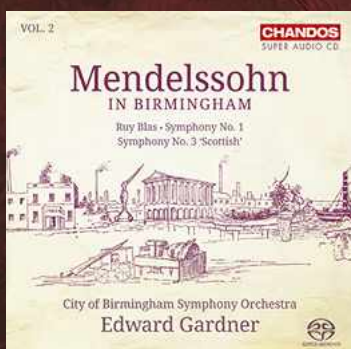
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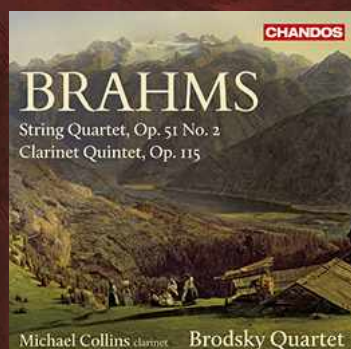
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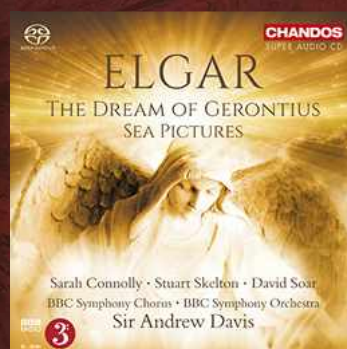
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The Sunday Times



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PPA Columnist of the Year

## The Richard Morrison column

## It's Christmas, so let's put our battles to one side and make music, not war



One of the most misunderstood phrases in Shakespeare is surely Orsino's line in *Twelfth Night*: 'If music be the food of love, play on'. At that point in the play Orsino is actually fed up with being in love. He is demanding an excessive dollop of music so his appetite for both music and love is sated. Music, in other words, is being called upon to extinguish love, not to fan its flames.

Well, we've certainly seen a lot of love extinguished in the classical music world during 2014. I can't remember a worse year for musical feuds. In a single weekend two conductors abruptly left their posts, both citing 'irreconcilable artistic differences'. The Vienna Staatsoper will undoubtedly survive without the (still to my mind mysterious) talents of Franz Welser-Möst, who apparently didn't see eye to eye with the Staatsoper's general director Dominique Meyer. After all, this isn't exactly an unprecedented flounce out. Such luminaries as Karl Böhm, Lorin Maazel and even Gustav Mahler also quit the same bearpit in a cloud of acrimony. But I fear for the future of the fledgling Qatar Philharmonic, with the promising Han-Na Chang generating such maximum negative publicity by resigning the day after the orchestra's BBC Proms debut.

In the US, meanwhile, simmering tensions between orchestral players and managements – faced with dwindling audiences, sinking endowments and the legacy of complacent wage settlements

from earlier years – flared into outright civil war in Minnesota and Atlanta. In Atlanta, as I write, a two-month lockout looks unresolved, whereas in Minnesota – after the longest lockout of musicians in US orchestral history – all sides at last seem resolved to make a fresh start, though only after the departure of the divisive British chief executive Michael Henson and 12 board members.

Let's not get too smug in the UK, however. We have our continuing feuds too. In October it was revealed that the Ulster

music-business mudslinging, however, I would direct your attention not to Belfast but to the feud in which I was unwillingly involved. Reviewing *Der Rosenkavalier* at Glyndebourne, critics from five national dailies, including me, commented on the appearance of the singer in the trousers-role of Octavian. Critics very rarely agree about anything, but in this instance we all came to the conclusion independently (we certainly didn't discuss it) that she didn't convince us visually in that role.

We've certainly seen a lot of love extinguished in the classical music world in 2014

Orchestra, the only professional orchestra in Northern Ireland, was in such dire financial straits that its continued existence after Christmas was in doubt. If that was alarming news, the spectacle of 'pass the buck' between the orchestra's board, Belfast City Council and the Northern Ireland Arts Council was even more disturbing. How could an ensemble with such a fine tradition of artistic vibrancy be allowed to reach the brink of bankruptcy? Northern Ireland's cultural leaders gave every impression of being a bunch of squabbling incompetents, which I am sure they are not.

If you wanted to witness a classic bout of prolonged and vicious

All hell then broke loose in the social media. We were accused of everything from misogyny to misunderstanding the art of opera. I personally was on the receiving end of vitriol a hundred times nastier than anything I have ever written about anyone. I don't blame singers for putting the boot into critics when they get the chance, and we shouldn't be in the business of dishing out criticism if we are too delicate to take it ourselves. Even so, I was astonished by the level of underlying bile that the furore revealed.

What lies behind all these feuds? Sometimes a chronic lack of funding leads to an atmosphere of recrimination. Sometimes there

are personality clashes. Sometimes real artistic differences lie behind disagreements (there was an element of that about 'critic-gate': the question of whether visual appearances matter in opera). Sometimes rival ambitions clash. And sometimes a feud is artificially whipped up by someone, such as a blog-writer, intent on creating scandal and gossip out of thin air.

It doesn't really matter. The main point is to realise that the time and energy poured into feuds is time and energy that cannot then be poured into music-making, or planning concerts, or raising money for music, or championing classical music to the wider world. With the public funding of music so precarious, with more and more entertainment options competing for punters' money, and with music so marginalised in many schools, this is a time when the classical music world needs to present a positive and (as far as possible) united front. I have been so impressed, over the past few years, by the way that musicians, managements, critics and indeed loyal audiences have kept exciting and adventurous music-making alive, despite the downturn in the economy and the bias towards popular culture in the media. In this alleged season of goodwill, let's draw a line under all those distracting feuds, and accentuate only this wonderful reservoir of positive energy in 2015. ■

*Richard Morrison is chief music critic and a columnist of The Times*



# SWEET SINGING IN THE CHOIR?

What does the future hold for choirs up and down the land? Slashed budgets and the distractions of modern life are making it harder than ever to fill our cathedrals with the sound of glorious singing. So, asks *Andrew Stewart*, is our choral tradition strong enough to withstand the pressure?

..... PHOTOGRAPHY JAMES CHEADLE .....

Few enduring British institutions have absorbed greater change than our cathedral choirs. Many were founded before the first Christian millennium's close, survived reformation and revolution, and weathered storms of Victorian non-conformity and dissent. Even the most recent, those established in living memory, have withstood tests set by society's secularisation and indifference to organised religion. Cathedral chapters and treasurers have managed to sustain choral worship at the heart of daily ritual for centuries, regularly griping about the cost and effort involved while understanding that a cathedral without a permanent choir is like a kite without wind. A year has passed since Llandaff Cathedral, having decided that cost and effort outweighed spiritual benefit, handed redundancy notices to its adult choir members. The timing was rotten – who wants the sack at Christmas? Beyond causing local pain, though, the episode induced stress in cathedral closes far from the Welsh diocese and sparked rumours of possible choral cutbacks elsewhere.

It hardly needs me, as a concerned outsider, to urge the Anglican Church to push the moral panic button. The loss of Llandaff's permanent choir and presumed existential threats to other choral institutions suggest there's sufficient cause for the institution to panic unaided. Before it's too late, church leaders and their acolytes need to address serious concerns about the future of choral worship in Britain's 43 cathedrals. It's time for them to return also to the subject of music and spirituality, explore the nature of Christian wisdom and the ways in which it can best be communicated through music, and consider the priceless value of sung worship in cathedrals. At the risk of overstating the case for cathedral choirs, their existence guarantees the preservation of sacred space in a world increasingly saturated with identikit shopping centres, dismal corporate websites and plaster-saint celebrities. The debate should begin with really hard questions: Are cathedral choirs essential? Or are they, like so many of their now-defunct parish church counterparts, ultimately surplus to worship requirements? ►





THE STORY OF ANGLICAN cathedral choirs today, despite Llandaff and speculation of the 'where next?' variety, is positive. In many ways, they've never been better in terms of quality or more imaginative in their responses to threats present and future. Those attending cathedral carol concerts this Christmas will almost certainly hear fine choral singing from resident choirs, well-trained groups of boys (and, increasingly, girls) and men. What they do has not been specially manufactured for the Christmas market; rather, it's part of the deal offered at daily evensong and Sunday services throughout the church year, often as good on a wet Wednesday in February as on the grandest of festive occasions.

Matthew Owens, organist and master of the choristers at Wells Cathedral, is passionate about Britain's unique tradition of cathedral music. Cathedral choir directors, he notes, should shout loud about the uplifting values of choral worship and cathedral choirs. There's plenty to shout about in Wells. The choir's boys began the present academic year performing Bach's *St Matthew Passion* at the BBC Proms with the Berlin Philharmonic and Simon Rattle. They were joined a few weeks later by the cathedral's girl choristers and vicars choral (as the choir's men are known), to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the foundation of the girls' choir at Wells with a new evensong freshly commissioned for the visit of the Countess of Wessex, royal patron of the Wells Cathedral Chorister Trust. The choristers then gathered in full fig for a photo shoot for this magazine before a trip to London to perform with Irish pop rock band The Script at the Pride of Britain Awards.

'It's been an unusually busy period for us,' notes Owens, 'but the daily experience of singing great music in an incredible building is what is central to the choir's life. All of our cathedrals have something very special about them. It's true that people come into our cathedrals because they're beautiful buildings. But they are often seeking so much more than an architectural thrill. If we happen to catch them for evensong, those unfamiliar with the daily liturgical round are often transformed by the experience, even if they are not religious by habit or affiliation.' Wells Cathedral Choir, he adds, is part of a spiritual tradition that stretches back to the institution's foundation over 1,100 years ago. 'We're all privileged custodians of this tradition. With that comes the responsibility of handing it on in a better state than we found it.'

Since arriving at Wells in 2005, Owens has worked tirelessly to fulfil his custodial duties. He created Cathedral Commissions



and New Music Wells as part of his mission, the former to fund new church compositions, the latter as a retrospective festival of sacred works from the past four decades. Wells has commissioned pieces from, among others, Judith Bingham, Jonathan Dove, Gabriel

music are not in short supply in our music lists, too.'

Matthew Owens accepts that the cost of maintaining cathedral choirs, whatever their repertoire diet, heads the list of serious threats. He says he and his colleagues around the

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## 'ALL OF OUR CATHEDRALS HAVE SOMETHING SPECIAL ABOUT THEM'

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Jackson, James MacMillan, Peter Maxwell Davies and Judith Weir, and recorded many of them for the Hyperion label. 'This is an important part of our work, for obvious reasons. But we try to promote new music as part of a balanced repertoire diet. Perhaps we do more contemporary work than elsewhere, but Stanford service settings and Renaissance

country were saddened and worried by what happened at Llandaff. 'There's no question that cathedral music is expensive. But choral worship is the core activity of cathedrals; it's the thing that keeps so many of them alive, and is among the reasons why growing cathedral congregations have bucked the downward trend at parish churches.' Music,



**ALL'S WELLS:**  
our cover stars Erin Davies and  
George Blundell leaf through  
a copy of *Carol for Choirs 5*

Owens continues, is almost always the largest expense in a cathedral's budget. 'The cost of the choir is usually the first thing to be looked at and often the first thing to be trimmed. I believe that we need to become much more skilful in telling the public at home and abroad about the unique and irreplaceable nature of British cathedral choirs.'

Judith Weir shared her views on the subject when we spoke in September. The new Master of the Queen's Music tinged her general optimism about the wider choral world with fears that cash-strapped cathedral chapters might follow Llandaff's lead and disband their choirs. 'Cathedrals are becoming big business, which is a concern,' she told me. 'I know quite a lot about fundraising and the economics of these things, and also that cathedral music has to fit within a broader budget. But choirs are so important to worship in those places. The thing that



**TOP VOICES:**  
what is it like to sing  
in a cathedral choir?

*Three members of Wells Cathedral Choir extoll the joys of singing*

**MADELEINE PERRING**

*Head girl chorister*



'To be part of Wells Cathedral Choir is just amazing. I can't really describe the feeling I get every time I sing in the Cathedral, but honestly, I love it. My advice to anyone thinking of auditioning to become a cathedral chorister is simple: relax and enjoy the moment. I know everyone says the same, but that's what you have to do.'

'At Christmas my favourite is when we're singing Midnight Mass and all the choristers are absolutely exhausted. It's just coming up to midnight; then the bell strokes 12. Everyone whispers "Merry Christmas" and the sound is absolutely magical. The whispers echo through the cathedral and it lights up all the choristers. That's my favourite.'

**GREGORY WILLS**

*Head chorister*



'Being a chorister really is like being in a family. I don't have any younger siblings, but it feels like I have 15 brothers! The special thing for me about singing in the

choir at Christmas is that, when the cathedral is completely dark, the choir's candles light up the cathedral.'

**IAIN MACLEOD-JONES**

*Tenor vicar choral*



'Belonging to Wells Cathedral Choir means many things to me. It means being part of an extraordinary choral tradition at Wells that stretches back more

than 1,100 years; it means performing the sung daily worship to the best of our abilities, working closely as a team, always striving for excellence; it means being at the forefront of new music for the church, thanks not least to our wonderful Wells Cathedral Commissions scheme, which means we have the privilege of premiering additions to the living sacred choral repertoire; it means enriching others, whether regular congregation members or tourists from around the world who may have stumbled into evensong quite by accident, through the power of the universal language of music. And it means doing something that I love every day, and all, I hope, for a greater good.'

worries me is that we are seeing cathedrals here and there saying how much it costs to have a choir.'

Guildford Cathedral, consecrated as recently as 1961, shows how a cathedral choir can flourish through serving its congregation and community. Guildford's girl choristers are drawn from local schools, while its boys are educated at Lanesborough, the cathedral's choir school. Katherine Dienes-Williams, organist and master of the choristers at

Guildford, explains that Christmas and other big occasions offer a chance for the choir to reach out to new audiences. Under her care, the choir's boys and men gather on Christmas Eve to sing to patients and staff at St Luke's Cancer Centre in the Royal Surrey County Hospital before returning to Guildford Cathedral for the Children's Nativity Service. The choir's girls are on duty for Midnight Mass, leaving the boys to deal with the morning service on Christmas Day. ►





**CHOIR AND NAVE:**  
the assembled boys and  
girls of Wells Cathedral

‘The girls create their own secret Santa and have a special Christmas post-box in the vestry,’ notes Dienes-Williams. ‘The boys come in on Christmas morning, go home for a quick lunch and come back for an afternoon repeat of our Nine Lessons and Carols service. It’s about building and maintaining something that all the choristers want to share. We work hard to sustain not just the highest musical standards but also a group ethos that they can feel proud of and in which they feel very much at home. This is where they can have friends, and also grow and develop and really excel themselves. The same goes for the choir men. People say there’s a lot of energy about the music-making here and our group ethos supports that.’

Dienes-Williams and her colleagues work hard to refresh the Christmas music list and introduce new repertoire each year. The approach has contributed to the growth of seasonal congregations and appears to be drawing newcomers to worship at Guildford Cathedral throughout the year. ‘We want to make the Christmas experience memorable not just for the choir but also for our congregation,’ she observes. ‘People will hear things here that they probably won’t

find elsewhere. In all our work, we’re aware of our ministry and mission to the people who come to the cathedral. Some may only visit at Christmas; for others, it may be their first and only experience of cathedral worship. That’s why it’s so important that we communicate with everyone and help them to find something in what we have to offer.’

Recent statistics show that cathedral congregations have grown significantly over

a support network of volunteers determined to keep cathedral choirs in business. ‘We have safeguarding-trained chaperones who look after our choristers, a community committee to provide us supper before the Nine Lessons and Carols, and other teams who offer us help.’ The goodwill and dedication of volunteers, concludes Dienes-Williams, boosts team spirit and contributes to the economy of cathedral choirs by reducing

the overall  
operating costs.

While concerns  
about funding  
are centuries old,  
headaches over  
chorister recruitment

## CATHEDRAL CONGREGATIONS HAVE GROWN OVER THE PAST DECADE

the past decade. Choirs, their music and their prominent part in ritual worship, all score high on the check-list of reasons why more people are flocking to cathedrals at Christmas, Easter and other major feasts. Meanwhile, events such as Wells Cathedral’s new music festival, local choral outreach programmes and annual initiatives such as ‘Be a Chorister for a Day’ have all helped raise awareness of what cathedral choirs are about. Katherine Dienes-Williams pays tribute to the parents who ferry their chorister offspring to and from cathedrals after school, at weekends and often between term times. Their commitment, she explains, belongs to

are a relatively new condition. The number of boy choristers has been in decline since the 1960s, hastening the demise of many parish church choirs and now diminishing the talent pool for cathedral choristerships. Institutions that would once have attracted queues of potential choristers on reputation alone are now casting the recruitment net through prominent press advertising and online promotions. ‘Society has changed and there are many more competing attractions for the attention of children than there were even 20 years ago,’ notes Matthew Owens. ‘The idea of long-term commitment has also become challenging for parents when it comes



**AND THEY'RE OFF!**  
the 3.30 from Wells Cathedral  
cloisters gets under way...

to deciding the nature of their children's activities. Yes, it's a big commitment to be a cathedral chorister, but what they get out of it in return is invaluable. Look around academia, music, sport and just about every profession and you will find former choristers who are outstandingly successful. I suspect many parents want their children to have a broad experience and think that they will get that by doing lots of different things. But I'm convinced that being a chorister is the best education a child can have. It makes them excellent team players, teaches them all kinds of disciplines, and encourages them to be focused rather than distracted.'

The Choir Schools' Association (CSA) represents the interests of 46 schools attached to cathedrals, churches and

collegiate foundations in Great Britain and Ireland and 13 other institutions that draw their choristers from local schools.

The organisation's members are responsible for the education of around 25,000 children, among them 1,700 boy and girl choristers. The latter are eligible for financial assistance from the government's Music and Dance Scheme, while over 100 choristers receive support from the Choir Schools' Scholarship Scheme. The CSA's Chorister Fund also offers means-tested bursaries to children who have been offered scholarships to a choir school but whose families are unable to pay residual school fees. Reaching Out, fairly billed as a

celebration of the Choir Schools' Association's work, includes case studies of choristers from low-waged backgrounds and economically deprived parts of the country. The report, written by the *Guardian's* education editor Peter Kingston, one-time head chorister at Westminster Cathedral Choir School and father of four former Wells Cathedral choristers, also documents the Chorister Outreach Project in primary schools, part of the National Singing Programme until its funding ran dry in 2011. Now in the hands of individual cathedrals, the COP continues to attract new recruits to the chorister ranks, introduce youngsters to the

fun of singing and correct misperceptions of a choir school education.

'We hope there's never a financial barrier to becoming a chorister,' says Matthew Owens. 'Very occasionally, it's difficult to make it work. And the finances don't get any easier, which is another reason why we need to engage with the public and stress how important our cathedral choirs are. We've already lost one choir in the past year and hope that no others disappear. Once this precious tradition has gone, that will be it. We don't want to be left with just the few iconic choral institutions that everyone recognises. There is great choral work

## SIGNING UP

*Wells Cathedral's master of the choristers Matthew Owens's tips for auditioning for a choir*



FOR OUR AUDITIONS, usually held in January, we ask prospective choristers to sing two pieces – it could be a hymn/carol and a song learnt at school or in the local church choir. It isn't

necessary to have had singing lessons, but I am interested in candidates playing an instrument at audition, if they are learning one. In a chorister audition, I'm always looking for the following qualities:

■ **An enjoyment of singing**

*This is essential, as you'll be doing a lot of it!*

■ **A musical ear**

*If you understand and have a feeling for the music, you'll develop much faster.*

■ **An ability to learn quickly**

*As a chorister, you'll sing different pieces all the time, so you'll need to keep up!*

■ **A good reading ability (of text)**

*The repertoire is often as much about the words as it is about the music.*

■ **Spark!**

*Dare I say we're looking for something of the X factor?!*

and amazing experiences going on in 43 cathedrals plus collegiate chapels in Britain. I want to see that thrive.'

Britain's cathedrals are sitting targets for devout believers in the idea of perpetual progress, whether scientific materialists or trendy evangelicals. While some see them as

ancient monuments, to be preserved as tourist-pulling outposts of the heritage industry, they're dismissed by others as lumbering

dinosaurs, symbols of rigid tradition, ecclesiastical megalomania and centuries of greed. Such opinions and their claims to truth fade into the background at this time of the year, drowned out by the buzz of seasonally expanded congregations enjoying carol services and other musical adornments to the liturgy. There's nothing quaint or outmoded about the sounds of cathedral choirs: in many ways, they offer a progressive and equally timeless model of music made in the moment, a necessary refuge from the ubiquitous stream of digital sounds and a bridge to something bigger than I, Me, Mine. Now that has to be worth celebrating at Christmas. ■

## 'BEING A CHORISTER IS THE BEST EDUCATION A CHILD CAN HAVE'





## THE JAMES NAUGHTIE INTERVIEW

## ANNE-SOPHIE MUTTER



It's not enough for music simply to be performed well, says the German violinist. Audiences will only continue to come to concerts if artists stop looking bored and instead display a passion for their art

PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN MILLAR

I'd rather like to be at the Yellow Lounge in Berlin in the week before Christmas. It's a club that may seem like any other in the city, but for the past few years it has been offering something different to the kids packed on the floor and lining the walls. And in December, they'll be hearing something many of them won't have heard before: Anne-Sophie Mutter playing for them.

On the face of it, the collaboration is awkward. But like the thrilling pianist Daniil Trifonov, who's become a Yellow Lounge regular, Mutter will be doing what I suspect she enjoys most – trying to open the door to her music to people who might not otherwise even discover it. The reason for doing it is interesting, and typical of her.

Might it be a false-sounding concert? Even patronising? She herself was won over when she listened to a recording of Jascha Heifetz, no less, playing in Berlin. 'He was playing what I might say were nonsense pieces, although there was some great Gershwin in there,' she says. 'But the way he played was so incredibly fascinating – so real and so intense – that I couldn't stop listening. I listened for two hours straight through without a break to little itzy-bitzy pieces. But it was great; there was such commitment. We all have to try to recapture that.'

This is the spirit of Mutter. She is an evangelist for music, because she refuses

## ANNE-SOPHIE MUTTER



EARLY BRILLIANCE:  
Anne-Sophie  
Mutter in 1980

**Born:** 1963 in Rheinfelden, Baden, Germany

**Studies:** Mutter credits Carl Flesch pupil Aida Stucki with her musical development during her formative years.

**Early promise:** at just 13, Mutter was invited by conductor Herbert von Karajan to perform with the Berlin Philharmonic.

**Finest recording:** her 1992 recording of the Berg Violin Concerto with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (DG) shows the violinist at the height of her mastery.

**First performances:** Mutter has premiered works by Rihm, Lutosławski, Gubaidulina and Penderecki.

to take for granted the assumption that everything will roll along and a new generation of audiences will replace those that die away without anyone noticing. 'When there is no creative moment on stage – when nothing seems to be happening, and the players are just doing their job – then the audience loses touch, particularly the young audience, which is suspicious of us anyway,' she explains. 'They need to be persuaded; they need to see and hear something exciting. There has to be a real gut involvement.'

On the Heifetz recording, she hears an ability to communicate that she's become convinced is the future for music. The works themselves will never die, she says – there is too much there, too much quality and too much genius – but it's striking that she is impatient to reach new audiences, evidently afraid that too many people might manage to get by without seeing a spark lit when they hear a live performance.

We're sitting in the enfolding arena of the Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford, where she'll be performing the Bruch Violin Concerto No. 1 later on with Oxford Philomusica and its music director Marios Papadopoulos, and we're recalling a conversation that we had on stage at the Verbier Festival in Switzerland two summers ago. The place was crawling with talented young musicians who were, thanks to the festival, brought into contact



with some of the world's great soloists. It was obvious that there was no one there who wouldn't be a sympathiser of hers. But it's not enough. 'We need to get a supply of high-spirited young musicians, and inspire them to inspire others.'

It's the reason for her own foundation, which she has been running for 17 years. It takes gifted players from around the world and offers them intensive training and even fine old instruments that the foundation will buy for them, each fitted to the player. She speaks of it like a baby.

'I hope my foundation helps in finding people and encouraging them to be bold – to develop their own personalities, viewpoints. They might be disliked for it. That doesn't matter in the least. Art is not there to please; art is there to ask people to rethink their positions, and to open their minds.'

The ingredient that's required is commitment. Mutter is struck by the fact that two of the four scholars who are working intensively at the foundation at the moment

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## 'Politicians, let's face it, don't want to put up the money'

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have come from Asia. 'Imagine coming from South Korea, from a completely different culture, with no European language – no English, no German – and working as diligently as this. At the age of 16! They work so hard.' She can't imagine herself having done it at the same age.

This admiration for the boldness of the young infuses her conversation. I wonder whether it betrays some alarm on her part about what is happening across Europe, and she can't wait to tell me about her concern about what is happening in Germany.

I suggest that in the UK, in the course of the argument about music teaching in schools (or lack of, far too frequently) there's an assumption that elsewhere it must be better. Don't other European governments put money into musical training in quantities we might envy?

I have touched a raw nerve. 'Politicians, let's face it, just don't want to put up the money. And that's true in Germany, too. I wrote a paper for the schools in Bavaria, drawing up a kind of curriculum, because they asked me to do it. And I was excited. But was it implemented? No. Why? Because the politicians didn't want to spend the money



**THEATRE OF SOUND:**  
Mutter photographed  
in Oxford's Sheldonian



**CLUB NIGHT:**  
at Berlin's Yellow Lounge  
in September 2013

I think it's true in all parties – don't feel they have to keep that spirit alive. They want other people to finance it. They won't put the money aside for music.'

She is evidently angered by this, but Mutter never comes across as sour. Before our conversation, I have been watching her rehearse the Bruch with the Oxford Philomusica – the *joie de vivre* in the Sheldonian is palpable. She's only in the country for a few hours, but nonetheless finds time for a masterclass before the rehearsal during which she spends a couple of hours immersed in the business of nurturing young talent, and explaining the path to real performance.

'We need a generation of passionate musicians,' she says. 'That's what I'm most concerned with. Sometimes I will play with an orchestra where it's obvious that the players are a little bored. Playing the music well, but without that spark. It's not true, incidentally in Berlin – the Philharmonic plays with such commitment that it's always hot. You can't mistake it. Elsewhere? Not always.'

that it would have needed to work. It's the same everywhere.

'Maybe Austria is the exception,' she continues. 'I think something there may be holding on. The Vienna Philharmonic and the opera are so important – to the economy and the culture – that maybe things are better there. But in Germany, certainly not.'

'Mendelssohn founded the first music school in the country because he understood its importance. Nowadays politicians – and



**IDEAL PARTNERS:**  
Simon Rattle and the Berlin Phil,  
says Mutter, 'play with such  
commitment that it's always hot'



**PERFORMING PASSION:**  
'a musician on stage has  
to be a human being, too'

She spends a few minutes talking about the LSO and the London Philharmonic, which she knows so well, and their ability to stay fresh when they are playing and rehearsing for an extraordinary number of hours each week. 'Sometimes I wonder how it can be done. But I'm glad it is.'

And we return to the obligation of a soloist and an orchestra to remember that even if they are playing the Bruch Concerto, or Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, there will be someone in the audience who has never heard the piece before, and is waiting for the experience of music to begin. 'You can play from the repertoire – the most familiar pieces – and still create a spark. Of course you can. You must. I tell young players to remember that this was once the popular music of its time. There is no reason why the spark can't be lit, time and time again. The music will work on the audience, if they know that something is happening on the stage. But we do have to make it happen: if players are lazy, or playing in a routine way, why should they expect the audience to get excited?'

It's one of the reasons why she's excited by what happens in the Far East. 'I think that after the War, and all the horrors, the Japanese fell in love with Beethoven. The Ninth Symphony is always very special there. I'm not joking when I say that you could find a taxi driver in Tokyo who could sing the "Ode to Joy", with the right words, and in German.'

I don't ask how many taxis she thought she might have to take in London to get the same result, although I do say that I could testify from recent experience that more drivers are

choosing to have BBC Radio 3 in their cabs. Maybe I've been lucky, but I like to think that it's true. Mutter thinks a great deal about that Japan experience, and the extraordinary growth of interest in Western music in China. How do we rekindle the same enthusiasm?

'We are blasé about it. That's the problem. If we care about music, we don't imagine that it can be under threat, because we know that it will always touch people, but I think that

## 'If players are lazy, why should the audience get excited?'

we do sometimes forget how important it is to make sure that younger people hear the works. Music won't die, but audiences can shrink. The idea that they can go through school and miss the chance, the door that they can open to this culture, truly horrifies me. We have to stop it happening.

'We're all in this for the same reason. We love the music and acknowledge its power. And we have to make sure that the same is true for future generations.'

If all this makes her sound like an educator, it's important to say that her own performances are still the spine of her professional life. She's just come back from New York where she opened the season at Carnegie Hall, and she talks about work on new repertoire, including a second violin

concerto by André Previn, her former husband. 'I wouldn't say that I'm conscious of moving in any particular direction; I'm always going from the right to the left and then backwards, with new repertoire as well as familiar pieces: the ones you can never tire of.'

She's now spent more than 25 years in a concert partnership with the pianist Lambert Orkis and that continues to be a thread that runs through her year. After such a long time, is there a danger of becoming stale?

'What has made it such a happy collaboration is that we both lead independent lives.' We're back to her conviction that a musical life has to be lived in balance with the world. 'He likes cats and I like dogs. Our families have often gone on holiday together, so we're close. I really think that we are complementary. Sometimes he will suggest repertoire that I don't know, but the great thing is that we've never turned down each other's ideas. He does different things when we're apart, but when we get together to perform we're fresh. It's a special relationship.'

It's one that does illustrate perfectly Mutter's convictions about music. She talks about some young players she's seen, rehearsing diligently for hours and hours every day, but unable to have interests elsewhere that infuse the commitment with a feeling for life. 'I see little ants working away on their scores, but without a life outside. What is there? A musician on the stage has to be a human being too, otherwise you won't understand the music, and you'll end up just repeating yourself. No life.'

It's in that spirit that she'll take to the stage in the Yellow Club in Berlin before Christmas. It's not an exercise in simplifying music, or wrapping it up in different clothes. As she heard Heifetz do on his own Berlin recording, she wants to suggest to some of those listening that there's a world that doesn't compete with their own, but turns in the same rhythm.

All they have to do is find it. ■





**T**he sound of church bells has been part of the UK's aural landscape for centuries, as vital a part of the country's musical and religious heritage as our church and cathedral choirs. Bells are rung for Sunday services, for all sorts of special occasions, and they are rung for the key seasonal celebrations including, of course, Christmas. There are over 6,000 sets of bells in towers around the country, which means there are thousands of bell-ringers, all of whom have learnt their 500-year-old art. But what does it actually involve? I found out over two months earlier this year, when I took up the challenge of learning how to ring a bell.

Bristol, where I live, is home to several fine bell towers. One of the crowning glories is the enormous ring of 12

bells at St Mary Redcliffe, a beautiful Gothic church in the city centre reputedly described by Queen Elizabeth I as the 'fairest, goodliest and most famous parish church in England'. Anthony Bulteel, ringing master of the St Mary

**We agree that learning to change ring in two months might be a bit ambitious...**

Redcliffe Guild of Bellringers, gamely agreed to teach me to ring; handily, he's a teacher in his day job. We agreed that learning to change ring (when the bells swap places in the pattern being rung) might be over-ambitious in just two months, so the goal was to ring in

rounds. A round is when the bells ring downwards from the highest to the lowest note, and it's how every piece of ringing begins and ends. Sounds simple? Apparently, Tony says, there's a lot more to bell-ringing than just pulling a rope.

Here's my diary of how I got on...



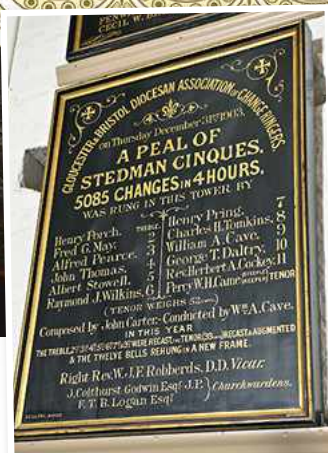
Rebecca Franks



# Learning the ropes

Bell-ringing has been going on in Britain for hundreds of year and is still practised by thousands of ringers. *BBC Music's* reviews editor **Rebecca Franks** heads to a church in Bristol to see if she can learn the art in just two months

..... PHOTOGRAPHY ROB SCOTT .....



**DING DONG MERRILY:** (main picture) Rebecca with her teacher, Anthony Bulteel; (left) outside St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol; (far left) a painted board in the chamber celebrating an impressive peal

## Lesson one

I've felt nervous all day. I've never rung a bell before, apart from a handbell in Britten's *Noye's Fludde* at university, and I don't know what to expect. And I can't remember the last time I learnt a new skill from scratch. I meet Tony Bulteel outside St Mary Redcliffe. He lets us in, whereupon we head up to the ringing chamber, where the bell ropes are. There's a slightly alarming 'danger' sign on the door warning people not to touch anything. I have visions of bells ringing wildly out of control, with me hanging on to the rope for dear life as I fly up into the belfry. Unlikely, I'm assured.

I'm going to be learning on the fourth bell. The first pull is, frankly, petrifying. The bell is far heavier and comes down far

more quickly than I expect. I spend the lesson learning the 'backstroke', part of the technique of ringing a bell. There's plenty to remember: don't look up, don't bend your knees; don't stand too far or too close from the rope. Most importantly, though, don't let go.

## Lesson two

This lesson I'll be learning the 'handstroke'. It involves catching the colourful, woolly 'sally' part of the rope and letting it slide through

your hands, using them as a brake to stop the bell. It's trickier than the backstroke, and is going to take a bit of work to master. As my lesson finishes, the group practice begins. One ringer, Russell Scudamore, 17, tells me he started ringing here when he was seven. 'I started on the third bell,' he says, 'ringing on a chair. I needed my dad to help as I was quite small.' St Mary Redcliffe's oldest ringer is 83 – this really is a hobby for all ages.

## Lesson three

Today is about perfecting what I've learnt so far. There's also a chance to explore the belfry, where 14 bells nestle behind the louvers. Most churches have six or eight bells, but here the main ring is of 12, with two extra to add chromatic notes. How the bells are hung is peculiarly British: from the 15th century, bells were for the first time mounted on a wheel with a rope, allowing them to rotate 360 degrees and to be controlled. Cue the art of change ringing, and the first societies of bell-ringers. Most of these bells were cast in 1903, ►



## RINGING ENDORSEMENTS

### Six celebrity bell-ringers

#### Alan Titchmarsh gardener

A ringer since he was around 10 years old, Titchmarsh is still a keen campanologist. He took part in his first quarter peal a couple of years ago. 'In these days of high technology, it is good to be part of a tradition that dates back 400 years,' he said in 2013.



#### Louise Brealey actress and journalist

Best known as Molly in the BBC's *Sherlock*, Brealey was a teenage bell-ringer. 'There's a magic moment when you're just pulling down a little bit and the bell is balancing,' she says; 'it's a really amazing feeling.'



#### Timmy Mallett children's TV presenter

Mallett learned to bell-ring as a teenager and currently rings at Holy Trinity Church in Cookham. It's home to a fine set of bells, the oldest of which dates from 1635.

#### Jo Brand comedian

'My best friend's dad was the local vicar and so it was expected that I would go to church every Sunday,' says Brand (below) of her childhood bell-ringing stint. 'As a kind of compromise I became a bell-ringer... it was really good fun actually.'

#### John Bunyan preacher

The author of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (above) rang in Elstow Church, near Bedford. But worried that it was too frivolous,

and that the bells were going to fall on his head, he gave up.

#### Frank Muir writer, broadcaster

Attracted by the 'agreeably dangerous' elements of bell-ringing, Muir learnt the art as a boy. He visited various country parish churches, and fondly recalled 'the bell-ringers' meat tea of ham and salad and mustard pickles'.



**LORDS OF THE RING:** Rebecca with three of her mentors; (right) an app displaying the 'Bristol' bell peal; (bottom) Rebecca watches the St Mary Redcliffe team in action

by Taylor's in Loughborough, now one of only two bell foundries in the UK. But the oldest bell dates from 1622, and it was cast in a pit in the church graveyard. It's strange to think that a bell that was heard during the English Civil War is still ringing out over Bristol.

### Lesson four

Now I have to put the backstroke and handstroke movements together to give the complete movement needed to ring a bell. It's a bit like co-ordinating arms and legs together when you're learning to swim.

### Lesson five

We chat while ringing. I'm off to a friend's wedding tomorrow in Wiltshire, at Edington Priory. There are, Tony tells me, ten bells there. That's another part of the fun: trips to other churches and cathedrals. The Dove's Guide for Church Bell Ringers website lets you search anywhere in the country for a local group, and tells you about the bells. It's handy for the 'tower grabbers'. Phil Butler, a St Mary

Redcliffe regular and bell-ringer since 1967, reckons he's ticked off 4,600 churches. Poppy Bulteel, bell-ringer of 29 years, also likes the chance to see behind the closed doors of historic buildings: 'In Worcester Cathedral, for instance, you can see the top of the barrel-vaulted ceiling when you go up the tower.'

**This is as much a physical workout as a musical activity**

### Lesson six

First milestone! I can now ring the bell entirely by myself. More than once. In fact, not to brag, this practice I rang it about 50 times or so. That might not seem much to the seasoned ringer, but for me it's a triumph. It's tiring, though, and I can see now why it's best to wear comfortable clothes. This is as much a physical workout as a musical activity.

### Lesson seven

Back from holiday, and two weeks without ringing. But I soon get back into the swing. A few of the bell-ringers for the Sunday service arrive at the end of my lesson, and I spot a mischievous glint in Tony's eye. He decides that we're going to try ringing in rounds for the first time. We take up our positions. The ringer on the 'treble' bell, says 'look to' – meaning get ready to ring. 'Treble's going.' I watch the person to my right for my cue. 'She's gone.' And we're off. It starts out quite well, actually sounding like a scale. But quickly it becomes clear I'm going at a different speed to everyone else. Clash! Clang! Sorry, Bristol.

### Lesson eight

So, after Sunday's experience, this lesson is about ringing the bell at different speeds...

### Lesson nine

After more individual practice – I can now also set the bell, which means bringing it back to





rest – it's time for another go at ringing in rounds. It goes a little more smoothly, and there's not a single clash. I can't pretend my timing is always spot on, though. As I leave, the far more harmonious sounds of the group ringing for evensong begin. Bell-ringing might be a hobby for people regardless of individual belief, but it's primarily a service to the church and the Sunday services are what everything's organised around.

### Lesson ten

It's the weekly St Mary Redcliffe practice, so I'll get to see how this should really be done. And I soon realise that if I think I've been doing well by ringing a bell by myself for half an hour, try ringing with 11 other people for any length of time. The group starts with 'Plain Bob doubles', moving on to 'Lincolnshire Surprise Maximus' and 'Bristol Surprise



Maximus'. All these wonderfully whimsical names are for the various 'methods', essentially the pre-determined order of bells. Ringers learn them by heart, from diagrams (both printed and in app form). A blue line zig-zagging over rows of numbers shows where your bell falls in the pattern, and there are tricks and rules that make memorising easier. 'I'm watching, listening and counting,' explains Simon Edwards, 20. 'I'm sort of dancing along the line in my head. I know my line and where other people are around me.' Knowing the methods allows ringers to tackle the Everest of bell-ringing: a peal attempt. Rung for special occasions, a peal is when a group rings at least 5,000 different changes, without stopping, which takes three or four hours. All round the ringing chamber are painted wooden boards marking peal success stories, including for the coronations of Queen Elizabeth II and King George VI.

### Lesson eleven

It's the final lesson before I try ringing with a bigger group. Just time for 30 minutes practising everything I've learnt so far.

### Lesson twelve

So, two months after I first stepped into the ringing chamber, I've learnt how to ring a bell! Now it's time to put my newly-learnt skill to the test. We start with five of us ringing. It goes well, and I'm delighted as I've stayed in control of the bell and been in the right place in the round. Next, a group of eight.

You have to wait that little bit longer for the whole group to have rung before it's your turn again. It goes well and it's a thrill to hear the bells ringing. But there are still four more bells... 'Would you like to have a go at ringing as a group of 12?' An unexpected step up. The noise is overwhelming, and my technique goes to pot. But it's a lot of fun.

After that it's time for another important bit of bell-ringing: the pub.

Bell-ringers are a friendly bunch. I'm invited to carry on ringing at a six-bell church in Bristol, and they are full of tales of the appeal of bell-ringing. I've got a long way to go before I master Bristol Surprise Maximus, but I've now got the basic tools. And, Simon Edwards tells me, 'once you get over this first hurdle, it really is a hobby for a lifetime.' ■

Find out more about where to learn to bell-ring from the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers at [www.ccb.org.uk](http://www.ccb.org.uk) or from [www.bellringing.org](http://www.bellringing.org)



# LULLAY, MY LIKING

For our Christmas issue, *Thomas Hewitt Jones* has written an *a cappella* four-part carol for the readers of *BBC Music* to sing in carol services and concerts.

Here the composer explains his inspiration and offers performance advice

Coming up with an innovative, tuneful carol for *BBC Music's* Christmas issue was an exciting task. The brief was to compose a carol with simplicity of form, and it was the Middle English 15th-century carol text *Lullay, my liking* that seemed to lend itself to an expressive yet succinct setting. Depicting the nativity scene with the Virgin Mary singing to the infant Christ, the text includes a recurring lullaby refrain after each verse.

When writing new Christmas music it's important to be aware of the existing canon, and to remember that the majority of our best-known carols began life as popular tunes sung in taverns and around the fireside. As we know, the revival in Christmas carols during the early 20th century led many writers to look back to a quasi-medieval style, exemplified by GR Woodward's *Ding Dong Merrily on High*.



**TOP SCORE:**  
English composer  
Thomas Hewitt Jones

In setting this old lyric, I decided the best way to respond to the text would be to draw on elements from different periods that define many of today's finest carols. As a result, within my carol you'll find neo-medieval textures,

folk-song melodies and harmonic movement inspired by one of my composing heroes, Peter Warlock. I have incorporated rising and falling melodic intervals in the refrain (to create a rocking feeling) with descending chromaticism in the bass part for an unsettling yet calm mood. The use of suspension helps punctuate the end of the refrain, and the verses are set in as direct and detailed a way as possible, using different combinations and variations in timbre, articulation, dynamics and harmony.

All these elements combine to engage respectfully with tradition, while offering something new to both singer and listener. ■

Other festive choral pieces by Thomas Hewitt Jones include: 'Baby in an ox's stall', 'Hear the angels sing' and 'The winding road'. View sample pages, listen to recordings, purchase and explore recent choral releases published by Boosey & Hawkes at [www.boosey.com/choralexplorer](http://www.boosey.com/choralexplorer)

## PERFORMANCE NOTES

*Composer Thomas Hewitt Jones's guide to singing his new work*

THIS CAROL IS BEST sung with a flowing feel, bringing out the long lines. It should have a quiet intensity, and a rocking feel – aim for a warm, blended sound. Dynamics should be adhered to as accurately as possible – hairpins also show the intended shape of the phrases. The ascending fifth at the start of the soprano/tenor solo in verse one should rise gently and delicately. Here are a few more hints and tips to help you get the most out of the score, printed opposite.

**Bar 17** – SATB to begin quietly after the solo.

**Bar 27** – the *tenuti* on 'He is Lord' should be broad and warm in feel. For maximum dramatic effect, do maintain *forte* from the last quaver of bar 28 all the way to the end of verse two, and then *subito piano* on the start of the refrain after the second verse.

**Bar 36** – *molto legato*, and bars 37-38 should be very rich in tone, with a slight feeling of *ritardando* over the barline into bar 38.

**Bar 39** – very bouncy, but quiet. Do take a crotchet out on the last beat of bar 47 to help attain a full sound on the downbeat of bar 48.

**Bars 52-54** – it works nicely if the dynamic can decrease quickly, giving way to a tender feel, which helps to depict the words. Beginning of

verse five – delicate, building to entry in bar 60

**Bar 61** – Not flippant, but celebratory in mood: delicately syncopated, rather than overly spiky.

*We do hope that those of you who sing in choirs will include 'Lullay, my liking' in your carol service or concert! Please feel free to photocopy the music for your choir and share it widely. We'd love to hear or even watch your performance, so do record it on an audio or video recorder, and either email the file to [music@classical-music.com](mailto:music@classical-music.com) or, if the file is too large, visit [www.wetransfer.com](http://www.wetransfer.com) and send the file from there. If you give the nod, we'll put your performances up on our website for everyone to enjoy. Happy singing!*

15th Century English

## Lullay, my liking

THOMAS HEWITT JONES

**Sweetly, gently rocking****REFRAIN**

**SOPRANO**  
**ALTO**

**TENOR**  
**BASS**

*p* *mp*

Lul - lay, my lik - ing, my dear son, my sweet - ing; Lul - lay, my dear

*p* *mp*

*p* *rit* *mp*

7 Refrains 1-5 Final refrain

heart, mine own dear dar - - - ling! dar - - - ling!

*p*

**VERSE 1** Soprano or tenor solo

*p*

I saw a fair mai - den sit - ten and sing:

17 Tutti *p* *p* **REFRAIN**

She lulled a lit - tle child, a swee - te lord - ing.

*p*

**VERSE 2***mp* bouncy

21

That e - ter - nal Lord is he that made al - le thing:

*mp* bouncy

26 *mp* *mf* *f* **REFRAIN**

Of al - le lords He is Lord, of al - le king - es King.

*mp* *mf* *f*



VERSE 3

31 *mf*

There was mic-kle mel-o-dy at that Child-es birth:—

*mf*

36 *mp* *mf* *p sub* *mp* *p* REFRAIN

Al-though they were in hea-ven's bliss they made mic-kle mirth.

*mp* *mf* *p sub* *mp* *p*

42 **VERSE 4** *mp*

An-gels bright Ah they sang that night, Ah and said-en to that Child

*f* *mp Ah* *Ah*

48 *ff* *mf* *mp* REFRAIN

"Bles-sed be Thou, and so be she That is so meek and mild."

*ff* *mf* *mp*

55 **VERSE 5** *pp* *mp* *molto*

Pray we now to that Child, and to his mo-ther dear;

*pp* *mp* *molto*

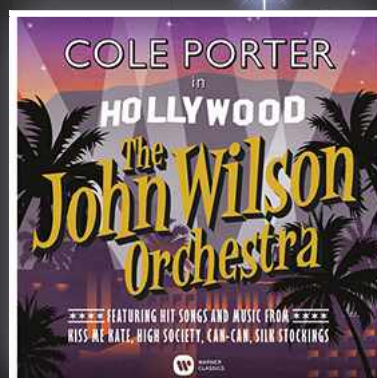
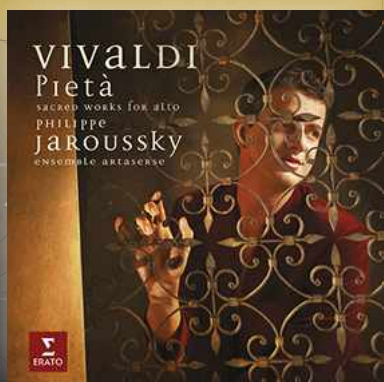
60 *f* *ff* FINAL REFRAIN

God grant them all his bless-ing that now ma-ken cheer!—

*f* *ff*

# BEST OF THE YEAR

## FROM WARNER CLASSICS & ERATO





# Bars of wonder

Most people, given half a chance, will rave about their favourite piece of music. But individual bars? We ask critics and Radio 3 presenters to identify the musical moments that make them go all weak at the knees

Musicians haven't always enjoyed the luxury of bars. Take a look at a score from the 16th century or before, and the chances are you won't see them – just a line of notes moving up and down the stave, with nothing in between. When barlines did start to appear, they were largely there as a tool of convenience, to help line up various vocal parts and help them stay together. Over time, however, composers saw the potential of the bar as a means of expression – in particular, the convention of stressing the first beat in a bar helped to give the musical line a particular shape.

The vast majority of bars take their place relatively anonymously in the music's general flow. Some bars, though, are special. We're talking about the bars with, say, dramatic chords or clever little harmonic or rhythmical twists that instantly take the music in an entirely new direction. The devil, as they say, is in the detail. So what are the individual moments that really get the critics excited – those 'wow' bars that, however often they've heard them, always raise the hairs on the back of their necks or bring a smile to their faces?

We asked ten leading broadsheet critics and BBC Radio 3 presenters to tell us just that. Some are excited by crashing chords that have them sitting bolt upright, others charmed by moments of exquisite subtleness. We've given each 'wow' bar a 'drama or charmer?' score to indicate which is which...

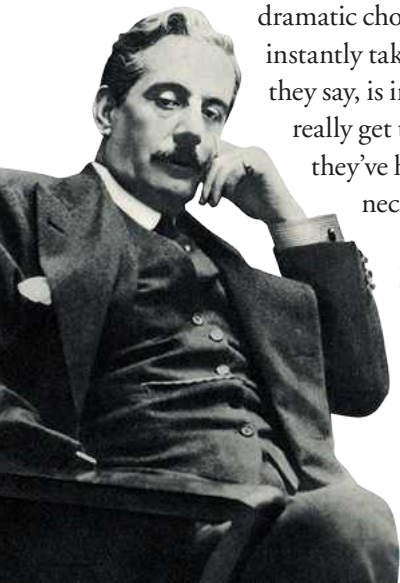
## Drama or charmer?

- 5 Hair-raising moment
- 4 Stirring stuff
- 3 Notes of joy
- 2 Quiet finesse
- 1 Subtleness itself

## SARA MOHR-PIETSCH *Radio 3*

The end of *Tosca* is full of screams – hers, mostly – but *Puccini* saves the best for the orchestra. *Tosca* is watching her lover being executed; she thinks it's fake, we know it's not. For a while, Puccini has been spinning a riff he nicked off Wagner: a lazy, smoky melody that passes from woodwind to strings over a plucked bass-line. It's meandering, but it has bite, and it ratchets up the tension. The shot rings out. The lover falls. *Tosca*, thinking he's acting, praises his artistry, and leads us back into the riff, now menacing and triumphant. And then it comes: as the riff modulates, the orchestra lets rip with a thrilling, *marcatissimo* primal scream; jazzy, brassy, chaotic, but unbearably tightly wound. The horror, *Tosca's* fate, even our own malicious delight in watching – all are packed into that chord.

**Drama or charmer? 5**





**SPINE-TINGLERS:**  
Michaela Martens as Judith in Bartók's *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*; (below) Mahler poured his soul into his Tenth Symphony; (far left) Puccini, master of the emotions; (below) the fate of Cavaradossi (Charles Craig) dawns on a horrified Tosca (Marie Collier)

**IVAN HEWETT** *The Telegraph*

Taken in isolation, my 'bar of wonder' might not seem so special. It's the first bar of the Trio of *Haydn's String Quartet in F major Op. 77 No. 2*. A sweetly swaying melody begins here, unfolding over a deep cello note. The expressive charge becomes more intense in the third bar, when the melody leans on a dissonant note – but even so, this doesn't seem a moment that would prompt that tell-tale pricking behind the eyes. However this melody doesn't come out of the blue. It follows a brisk little *Menuetto* in the home key of F major. This is in Haydn's rumbustious, rustic vein, with lots of witty rhythmic accents in the 'wrong' place. After the last peremptory chord come four beats of silence. We're on the edge of our seats, ready for another raspberry from classical music's arch-tease. What we get is that lovely, soft-edged melody, in the unfathomably distant key of D flat major. It's the sudden change of key and texture that give the swaying melody such a depth of innocent nostalgia. Here, as so often in classical music, context is everything.

**Drama or charmer? 2**

**ANNA PICARD** *The Times*

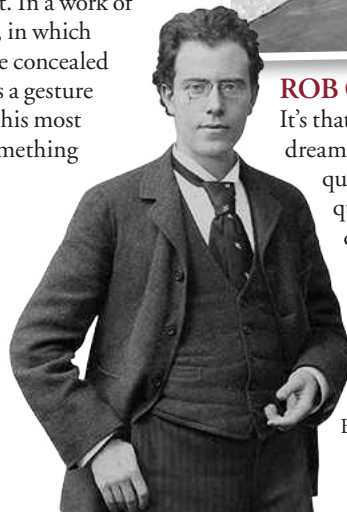
The skyscraper was in its infancy when *Bartók* wrote *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*, yet the impact of the C major chord that blazes at the opening of the Fifth Door is something like the vertigo felt when you look up at one of these temples of wealth and power, stone and steel. It isn't merely the height of the chord and those that follow it, moving in implacable rhythmic unison. It's the colossal weight of a full orchestra with off-stage brass and organ versus the pitiful fragility of the short high C gasp from Bluebeard's new wife, Judith. We know she is doomed. She does not. In a work of extraordinary suspense, in which seven types of horror are concealed behind seven doors, it is a gesture of genius to transform this most guileless of keys into something so terrible. Though Bluebeard describes a kingdom of rolling pastures, what I hear is a man-made edifice: a palace for a despot.

**Drama or charmer? 5**



**ROB COWAN** *Radio 3*

It's that sense that never in your wildest dreams could you have created something quite so beautiful. The work in question is one of the six string quartets that *Mozart* dedicated to his 'dearest friend', Haydn. It's the *Quartet No. 16 in E flat*, the second movement *Andante con moto*. The miracle here is in ►





the first two bars, though it's the second bar that really takes the palm. The first features tender triplets from the cello, the very first note tellingly marked *piano*, the first in the second phrase, *sforzando* – so Mozart is already guiding the whole ensemble to lean in a certain direction. But it's the second bar – the one that really glows – that allows the cello to weep in dialogue with those aching middle voices, the second violin mirroring the shape of the cello's phrase, the vaguely dissonant web of harmonies momentarily so sublime that you can hardly help revisiting them. Nothing in all of chamber music is quite like this.

**Drama or charmer? 1**

## HELEN WALLACE

*BBC Music Magazine*

**Brahms's Horn Trio Op. 40** stands out in his chamber music for its uniquely strange beauty, but how to choose just one bar? Would it be the moment in the *Andante* when, after 28 bars of apprehensive tilting in the dominant key, the piano relaxes finally into a ravishing melody in the home key of E flat? Perhaps it has to be in the spellbound *Adagio mesto*. The piano sweeps us through rippling curtains of minor chords, into a dark inner sanctum. The instruments converse in canon with a long, sinuous asymmetric lament that winds down to two bars marked '*quasi niente*' – as if nothing. Brahms seems to be sharing something unbearably intimate; the last breath of a loved one? But 15 bars later, here it is – a tentative arpeggio-like phrase in the major glimmers like a smile, an idea that will catch fire in the glorious *Allegro*; no expression of hope could be more poignant.

**Drama or charmer? 2**

## STEPHEN JOHNSON

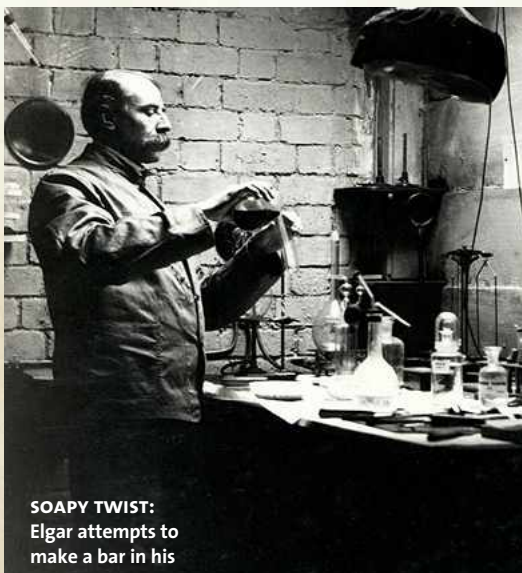
*Radio 3 presenter*

Four minutes into the *Adagio* second movement of **Bruckner's Symphony No. 7** there are four bars I only have to imagine to summon a prickling on the back of my neck. The opening threnody has reached its climax; violins, then clarinets tail off above soft high brass harmonies. And then it happens: down in the bass, Wagner tubas and bass tuba sound a delicious hushed surprise chord, from which a horn slides upwards questioningly. As a teenager I sensed something mysterious and important here. Realising years later that the horn intones exactly the same notes as the oboe does in the first aching bars of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* shed some light – or did it? No, there's more. After all that contained but still intense grief, a deep, velvety, inscrutable voice seems to say 'However...', and from that emerges the heavenly second theme. There's a rightness here only music can explain.

**Drama or charmer? 3**

## COMPOSERS AND BARS

*How other sorts of bars have shaped musicians' lives...*



**SOAPY TWIST:**  
Elgar attempts to  
make a bar in his  
chemistry lab

THERE'S MORE THAN one kind of bar, of course. One composer who loved bars more than most was **EJ Moeran** (1894-1950). The bar at Lansdowne Arms Hotel in Kenmare, Co. Kerry, was the English-Irish composer's



favourite haunt – so much so, in fact, that it is now officially called the Moeran Bar. Less keen on bars for a while was **JS Bach** (1685-1750), who found himself behind them for three weeks in 1717. The crime that led to his imprisonment? Insisting that he no longer wanted to work for the Duke of Weimar. On the other side of the legal fence, meanwhile, was **Tchaikovsky** (1840-93), who was called to the bar when he graduated in law from the School of Jurisprudence in St Petersburg in 1859 – unlike Handel and Schumann, who began law degrees but failed to complete them. Bars of soap, meanwhile, were what excited **Elgar** (1857-1934), who in 1908 started to make them in his chemistry lab at home – sadly, he reported, his wife Alice refused to wash with them. And finally, there's English composer **John Wilbye** (1574-1638), who was neither pub-dweller, prison-bird, lawyer or cosmetics manufacture. As a prosperous sheep-farmer, however, he was more than familiar with baas.

## FIONA MADDOCKS

*The Observer*

The novelist Thomas Mann has one of his characters describe the *Arietta*, the second and last movement in **Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 111**, as lost in 'those dizzying heights that one may well call otherworldly or abstract' – a concise and unbeatable

## Puccini is out to shred my heart, and I can do nothing about it

summing up. The movement opens with a serene C major theme followed by nine variations, each more bizarre, dense and complex than the last. My 'wow' bar comes near the start, after the 16-bar theme has been stated for the second time. Half way through the repeat bar, marked *dolce*, there's a tiny, seemingly innocent semi-quaver phrase in the left-hand. It unfurls like a wisp of smoke. A syncopation is established. The harmony shifts. Immediately the music starts

to sway gently, as if a massive edifice is splitting asunder in slow motion. In this mere half bar, order is unhinged, letting loose a ferocious wildness of imagination as Beethoven bids farewell to the piano sonata form.

**Drama or charmer? 1**

## RICHARD MORRISON

*The Times*

I will cheat and nominate one bar and one crotchet. And what an ear-popping, epoch-defying, angst-exuding, spine-shivering, dissonance-crunching, mind-blasting five beats they are. The whole of **Purcell's** eight-part motet **Hear my Prayer, O Lord** is a compressed masterpiece of Baroque anguish, but the ultimate 'wow' moment occurs three bars from the end. Purcell is piling up counterpoint on counterpoint over a bass line descending step by step to a bottom G. When it hits that G, the chord above is a shuddering minor 9th in which F, G and A flat collide. Purcell unwinds it into even more dissonance. On the last quaver of that bar we hear C, D, F, G and A sung simultaneously, with the E flat from the beat before still ringing in our ears. And what about the amazing first chord of the next bar? It seems like a conventional



**I MEAN, WOW!:**  
the death of Mimì (Norah Amsellen)  
has Rodolfo (Roberto Aronica, right),  
the audience and critics in bits

suspended fourth on a dominant, but Purcell sounds suspension and resolution simultaneously. Audacious, avant-garde, totally astonishing.

**Drama or charmer? 3**

**JESSICA DUCHEN** *The Independent*  
How many times have I heard **Puccini's *La bohème***? Doesn't matter; that ending gets to me without fail. The 'wow' bar isn't when Mimì dies; it's the moment when Rodolfo realises she is dead. His friends can't bear to tell him; he can't believe it; there's a terrible silence; and then those bleak horns ring out in primal despair. I know full well that that old rascal Puccini is a master craftsman and is out to shred my heart, yet there's nothing I can do to stop it. The sound of the horns catches Rodolfo's anguish so precisely and with such compassion that in a few short seconds you lose again any person close to you you've ever lost; it all comes flooding back. That's his genius. At least it's not just me that turns into blubbing jelly. I once fled to the loos to get myself back together, only to run straight into a red-eyed fellow critic doing exactly the same.

**Drama or charmer? 4**

**ANDREW MCGREGOR** *Radio 3*  
Two-thirds of the way into the *Adagio* first movement of **Mahler's *Symphony No. 10***, there's a sudden hush. The upper strings meander aimlessly, lost in an emotional desert, fading to nothing. A blazing A flat minor chorale from the full orchestra is the response... but it's not enough to stabilise the movement. And then, as tonal certainty evaporates, Mahler slams into us with a dissonant pile of thirds, an enormous nine-tone scream of agony unlike anything he'd written before: an apocalyptic moment, subsiding only to leave a laser-like trumpet burning into a second massive pillar of pain, before the shriek of high violins dissolves into a consolatory coda. It's a terrifying bar, as between these two discords we glimpse Mahler's soul in torment, utterly exposed, questioning everything – his life, his marriage, his music – and ripping an opening into the musical world to come. ■

**Drama or charmer? 5**

Hear all 14 'bars of wonder' at our website: [www.classical-music.com](http://www.classical-music.com)



## BBC Music Magazine choices

**Oliver Condy** *Editor*

**Debussy's *La Mer*** is full of thrilling ebbs and flows, but it's the depiction of the sun reaching its zenith in 'De l'aube à midi sur la mer' (From the dawn to midday at sea) that has me reaching for the cold flannels. Debussy achieves his build-up in just four bars; brass, woodwind, harps and growling brass pootle around in the sub-dominant key of G flat, with some delicious slides into E and F before – wham! – a *crescendo* within one bar sees the orchestra hurtle from *piano* to *forte* and into the warm home key of D flat, cymbals, full brass and strings contributing to a staggering climax.

**Drama or charmer? 5**

**Jeremy Pound** *Deputy editor*

The opening of the *Allegro molto* final movement of **Sibelius's *Fifth Symphony*** is a fidgety beast. Strings scuttle restlessly, and even when the horns enter with their famous 'Thor's Hammer' motif, they seem strangely unable to settle – we're in E flat major, but not really comfortable there. Next, a melody in upper woodwind starts to point us in the right direction. And then at last, a full 154 bars into the movement, the moment we've been itching for arrives – heralded by a trademark Sibelius timpani roll, we all land sublimely together in the key of C. I grab my glass, and smile. Bliss.

**Drama or charmer? 4**

**Rebecca Franks** *Reviews editor*

The blaze of sunshine that opens **Richard Strauss's *Im Abendrot* (At Sunset)** never fails to overwhelm me. It's just an E flat major chord, but written over such a vast span – from the low E flat of the double basses to a G played by the piccolo five and a bit octaves above – that it seems to shimmer on the horizon. Strauss (below) marks the chord *fp*, allowing horns and bassoons to sing through, and the orchestral sound is never that bright again. The sun slowly sets throughout this beautiful song about peace at the end of life.

**Drama or charmer? 3**

**Rosie Pentreath** *Staff writer*

I can remember the first time I heard the moving climax of the 'Air' from Grieg's *Holberg Suite*, and the high Cs in Allegri's *Miserere* turn me into a wreck. But it's bar 16 of the **Prelude to Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*** that gets me. The piece is famous for the anguished 'Tristan Chord', but it's the astonishing twist caused by the interrupted cadence in bars 16-17 that lingers; after the tension of the opening, that moment creates an incredible release for the sweeping 'glance' *leitmotif* in the cellos.

**Drama or charmer? 3**



# 15 operas ripe for rediscovery

..... ILLUSTRATION DAVID LYTTLETON WORDS ROBERT THICKNESSE .....

**H**ere's a mystery: if there are 1,800 individual works worth an entry in the *Grove Dictionary of Opera*, how come everyone just wants to see *Carmen*, *La bohème* and *La traviata* all the time? Why are we fixated on watching the same few unlucky girls hurrying to their early graves, when there exist so many more imaginative ways to slaughter your heroines?

Galloping to the rescue, repeatedly, for the last 37 years, comes record label Opera Rara, whose 51 recordings to date of forgotten operas show that there are loads of exciting ways for your heroine to snuff it: we discover Gabriella di Vergy keeling over from shock when presented with the still-warm heart of her beloved; Rosmonda being poshly stabbed to death by Eleanor of Aquitaine; and Maria Padilla dying out of 'a surfeit of joy'. The company has been ahead of the game in restoring Donizetti and Rossini's overlooked works, so here are a few more suggestions for the next decades...

## 1 Tsar Saltan

(Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, 1900)

Where to start? How about here, with Rimsky-Korsakov, the most prolific opera composer to be almost completely ignored (outside Russia, at any rate). Prince Gvidon turns into a bumblebee in the score's only well-known bit. The reason? Well, he needs to get a message to his father in the royal court and deliver a couple of well-aimed stings to his horrid aunts there too. There's also a squirrel with golden nuts. It's an enchanting fairy-tale opera, and the orchestra makes the most amazing sounds.

## 2 Iris (Pietro Mascagni, 1898)

Mascagni spent his whole life trying to recreate the success of his first smash-hit opera, *Cavalleria rusticana*, written when he was 26. It never really worked out, but he was a talented and versatile composer. Two years before Puccini's *Madam Butterfly*—and not so long after Gilbert & Sullivan's *The Mikado*—he discovered the joys of turning Japanese. Osaka fancies Iris so, obviously, he kidnaps her. But alas, she doesn't fancy him, so he hands her over to his mate Kyoto to put in his brothel. Iris objects to this and drowns herself in a sewer.

## 3 The Dragon of Wantley

(John Frederick Lampe, 1737)

Without doubt the greatest opera ever written, and the smash hit of 1737 London. Henry Carey and Handel's bassoonist John Frederick Lampe decided Italian opera had really gone too far when the Meister's 1736 opera *Giustino* included the hero Justin beating up a preposterous 'Sea-monster'. So they came up with a singing dragon in Yorkshire, a debauched hero ('Moore of Moore Hall') who imitates the castrato Farinelli and is squabbled over by the love-interests Margery and Mauxalinda. The dragon, vulnerable only in its 'arse-gut', is finally dispatched by Moore using a special pair of winklepickers. Handel thought it was great and went to see it every night.

## 4 Ivan IV (Georges Bizet, 1863)

Known as 'The Terrible', of course. The Tsar, that is, not the opera. And with such a subject how could you go wrong? As it happens, Bizet, one of the unluckiest composers of all time, found a way, by peevishly withdrawing it from one theatre and offering it to the way posher Paris Opéra, who summarily rejected it. The opera was

finally premiered in 1946, over 70 years after his death. This *grand opéra* has the usual big-chorus turbulence of the genre, plus all the fun aspects of Russian barbarism: mass executions, rape, assassination, madness. Bizet couldn't write a dull note.

## 5 Acante et Céphise

(Jean-Philippe Rameau, 1751)

Bodged up by Rameau to celebrate the birth of Louis XVI's short-lived (luckily for him!) elder





brother. In a plot described as 'the most puerile that Rameau set', two lovers are separated by an evil genie who tries to variously kill and rape them, before they are rescued by a good fairy who luckily has amazing superpowers on this auspicious day. While separated, the pair get bracelets that work like walkie-talkies, allowing them to keep in touch emotionally. Rameau makes the orchestra sound wild and fantastic, and his dance and descriptive music is the top of the Baroque.

## 6 Undine (Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann, 1815)

Mermaid operas – and their subset, snowgirl-operas – are great because they yield amusing deaths like Rimsky-Korsakov's Snegurochka melting into a dirty puddle. Following the standard pattern, fish-girl Undine forfeits her soggy life for love, which means on the plus side she gets a soul but with certain minuses, like misery and death. ETA Hoffmann is better known as a writer of uncanny German

Romanticism but thought of himself as a composer, and this piece really founded a new tradition in German opera which led through Weber to Wagner.

## 7 Die Rheinnixen (Jacques Offenbach, 1864)

It was Offenbach who immortalised Hoffmann operatically, and he also had a crack at some mermaids (or 'nixies' as they are never known in English). The opera features one case of 'war-related head injury amnesia' (according to German Wikipedia) and one long-term coma on the part of the heroine, which is mistaken by the other characters for death, with confusing consequences. Basically, the Rhine-spirits intervene in a good way to resolve some vexed love issues and put paid to a gang of mercenaries who are ravaging the country. The well-known Barcarolle (from *The Tales of Hoffmann*) made its first appearance here, and the piece is full of the dreamy German Romanticism that was what Offenbach really wanted to write.

## 8 Die Loreley (Max Bruch, 1863)

Our last water-borne heroine. We are in medieval Germany so the *dramatis personae* enjoy names like Bertha and Hubert. The drama revolves around the dumped peasant Lenore who finds herself pouring wine at her ex-lover's wedding, so she does a quick deal with the river spirits: her soul in exchange for instant nuclear-sex-appeal surgery. It all ends very badly. Bruch read the libretto in 1860 and was so enchanted he started work immediately. But he got himself sued by the writer Emanuel Geiber for breach of copyright. Geiber eventually relented and let Bruch get on with it. The result is very tuneful and atmospheric, almost a symphonic poem, with debts to Beethoven and Spohr.

## 9 Le roi d'Ys (Edouard Lalo, 1875)

Edouard Lalo was another Frenchman who, like Bizet and Berlioz, suffered from his countrymen's appalling taste, ignorance and snobbery. His first opera *Fiesque* was refused performance, and likewise this one, his second; it was finally put on at the Opéra-Comique in 1888. It concerns the need to think seriously about coastal defences if you live by the sea. Two daughters of the King of the Breton city of Ys are in love with the same guy. This causes one of them to break off her engagement with another guy who then basically knocks a hole in the dam which keeps the water out. The city is drowned. This has a claim to be the great forgotten French national opera. ▶



## BACK IN ACTION:

(clockwise, from top) soprano Nancy Shade and tenor Ryszard Karczykowski in the 1981 premiere of Prokofiev's *Maddalena*; soprano Rosa Ponselle in Lalo's *Le roi d'Ys* in 1924; Rimsky-Korsakov's *Tsar Saltan*



## 10 The Wreckers

(Ethel Smyth, 1906)

Ethel Smyth – suffragette, lesbian, eccentric and all-round good egg – is one of England's unsung musical glories, and naturally her flouting of all Victorian conventions meant her work was scorned here and better appreciated in Germany. This Wagnerian *tour de force* paved the way for Britten's *Peter Grimes*, and not only in its seaside setting. A Cornish village makes its tawdry living by luring ships onto the rocks, but the local Methodist preacher's wife and her lover try to warn the ships off. For their pains they are walled up in a sea cave and left to drown. There is great sea music and muscular characterisation of the village.



## 11 La gioventù di Enrico V

(Saverio Mercadante, 1834)

So Lord Harcourt, keen for his sister to become queen, has to stop her eloping with Arturo di Northumberland, who is disguised as a cab driver. At one point Miss Harcourt's Garter (the order, not the garment) is chucked through the window of the Palace of Westminster to land at the Prince's feet as he enters the Abbey for his Coronation. Yes, this Enrico V turns out to be our very own Prince Hal, not some Kafkaesque Italian, seen through the eyes of the 19th-century



librettist Felice Romani. Mercadante is the missing link between Donizetti and Verdi – prime Opera Rara label territory.

## 12 Gli equivoci

(Stephen Storace, 1786)

Shakespeare's mistaken-identity knockabout *The Comedy of Errors* apparently wasn't complicated enough for the taste of librettist Lorenzo da Ponte, who introduced a wife for one of the Dromios to perk things up. Englishman Stephen Storace was Mozart's friend and pupil, and it shows in his deft and delicate scoring for the windband and extended ensemble finales. This is a fabulous, varied score which is up there with the output of Italian opera composers like Cimarosa.

## 13 Salvator Rosa

(Carlos Gomes, 1874)

The expatriate Brazilian composer Gomes was one of 26 children and was briefly nurtured as a possible successor to Verdi. The story concerns the proto-Romantic eponymous artist's apocryphal involvement with the 1647 uprising in Naples against Spanish rule. None of this actually happened,

and the rest is the usual stuff of Italian opera: thwarted love, treacherous rulers, murder, suicide, heartbreak and despair.

## 14 La libertà contenta

(Agostino Steffani, 1693)

The future King George I had this opera made as a yellow card to his gadabout wife Sophie: that must be one of the plusses of being king. The message is that marital fidelity is fun, or at least more fun than getting your head chopped off. In the event it was Sophie's fancy man who got arrested and 'disappeared' after the couple failed to heed the warning. Agostino Steffani was an astonishing man: priest, spy... and Handel's musical mentor. His free-flowing idiom mixes jaunty 17th-century Venetian opera with the new *opera seria* in a rich musical stew of great beauty.

## 15 Maddalena

(Sergei Prokofiev, 1911)

Teatime turns sour when artist Genaro realises that his ugly friend and guest Stenio is also his wife's lover. It's all a bit uncomfortable since, weirdly, Stenio didn't realise that the woman he'd been having it off with was his friend's wife. They both decide that Maddalena deserves to die, but things go a bit wrong and they kill each other instead. Maddalena looks at their corpses and is puzzled about who she loved anyway. Prokofiev's first mature opera is in the turbid style of Richard Strauss, with admixtures of Scriabin's heavy chromaticism – a very bracing and effective one-acter. ■



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## MUSICAL DESTINATIONS

# SYMPHONIC TECTONICS

## Reykjavík: Iceland

Its isolated position in the North Atlantic has made Iceland's capital city a hub for creativity and the pushing of musical boundaries, as **Rosie Pentreath** discovers

Crystal clear air, hot springs, midnight sun and the Northern Lights: Iceland has long been known for its breathtaking natural attractions. But another big draw is what it has to offer culturally. Exports include singer-songwriter Björk, composer Jón Leifs (see box, below) and now, thanks largely to the completion of the stunning Harpa concert hall in 2011, the Iceland Symphony Orchestra, which made its debut at the BBC Proms this year.

Like its population, Iceland's musical offerings are largely concentrated in the coastal capital, Reykjavík. A wind-bitten city, overlooked by the imposing Esja mountain range and met by the icy North Atlantic,

its natural environment makes it incredibly dynamic. Its location is at the confluence of two tectonic plates: you only have to travel 40km east to visit the beautiful Thingvellir National Park, part of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge where the North American plate is moving away from the Eurasian plate, to see how volcanoes and earthquakes constantly re-work the landscape. Harsh winds prevent many trees from growing – a local joke divulges that if anyone were to get lost in a forest in Iceland, all they would have to do is stand up.

### 'Iceland breeds creative people; it's common knowledge here'

Creativity seems to be the very fabric of Reykjavík. It's apparent in the museums, street art and architecture: landmarks include the futuristic Perlan, which houses exhibitions, cafés and shops, and the Hallgrímskirkja, Iceland's largest church. Nestled in between are rows of houses with brightly coloured corrugated iron roofs.

'In my mind, Iceland breeds creative people; it's sort of common knowledge here,' explains Steinunn Birna Ragnarsdóttir, the music director at Harpa. 'When you live with volcanic eruptions, earthquakes and troubles of that magnitude, you become acutely aware of what matters in life, and you don't expect everything to come from outside help.'

Harpa, which juts up from Reykjavík's harbour, has been a hub for such creativity since it was controversially funded in the

wake of Iceland's financial crash in 2008. 'We now have 1.2 million guests per year in a country of 330,000 people – that says everything that we need to say in terms of its success,' says Ragnarsdóttir. She explains that it has also lifted the standard of the Iceland Symphony Orchestra. 'It's inspiring the musicians, creating more music and expanding the audience. We're finally on the international map and comparable with the rest of the world.'

Harpa's glass façade, designed by artist Olafur Eliasson to resemble the volcanic rock basalt, incorporates coloured panes of glass that light up to resemble crystals. The main auditorium, 'Eldborg' (literally 'Fire Castle') is named after a nearby volcano and is painted a deep red to represent its fiery centre, reinforcing Ragnarsdóttir's point about the role the environment plays in inspiring its population.

## LOCAL HERO

### Jón Leifs



One of Iceland's most celebrated composers, Jón Leifs (1899-1968) is known for depicting the country's natural phenomena in his music. His tone poem *Hekla* traces the stages of a volcano erupting

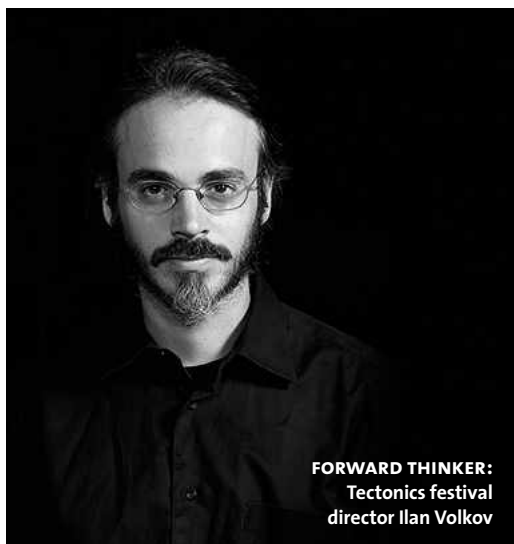
while *Geysir* offers a musical interpretation of the fountains of hot water that erupt from the volcanic landscape. Leifs studied composition at Leipzig Conservatoire under Aládar Szendrei and Paul Graener before returning to Iceland to consolidate his fascination with the country's folk traditions into a distinctive compositional style. His works often have a spacious and primitive feel.



**A TOUCH OF GLASS:**  
Reykjavík's stunning Harpa concert hall; and (below) the Perlan exhibition centre







**FORWARD THINKER:**  
Tectonics festival  
director Ilan Volkov



**BLOCKS OF COLOUR:**  
Reykjavik's striking  
multi-coloured houses

## REYKJAVÍK MUSICAL DESTINATIONS

In the middle of April, Harpa hosts conductor Ilan Volkov's annual Tectonics festival. A showcase of contemporary symphonic music performed by the Iceland Symphony Orchestra and other Icelandic artists, it is just one of the many pioneering events at the Harpa concert hall. 'A major theme of the festival is contrasts,' says Volkov. 'Named after the geological plates that meet in Iceland, Tectonics is about the dynamic meeting of different musical cultures and genres, from composition and improvisation to electronic music.'

Most recently, the festival celebrated music by experimentalist US composer Alvin Lucier and featured new works by Iceland's Valgeir Sigurðsson and Skúli Sverrisson, with spectacular moments that seemed to summon the very energy and colour of Iceland's landscape into the performances themselves. That's the power of this wonderful place. ■

## REYKJAVÍK 5 MUSICAL HIGHLIGHTS

**Tectonics** Tectonics 2015 takes place from 16 to 17 April at Harpa concert hall. Featured composers will include Alvin Curran, Stephen O'Malley, Sarah Kenchington and Klaus Lang, with works by Iceland's Áki Ásgeirsson and Magnús Pálsson. [tectonicfestival.com](http://tectonicfestival.com)

**Reykjavík Arts Festival** This annual celebration of art, music and dance features performances from the Iceland Symphony Orchestra, Icelandic Opera and National Theatre of Iceland among others. The 2015 festival will take place during May and June (dates to be confirmed). [visitreykjavik.is](http://visitreykjavik.is)

**Dark Music Days** From 29 January to 1 February 2015 Harpa will host the Dark Music Days festival. Named after Iceland's dark winters, the

festival celebrates contemporary Icelandic music and features the Reykjavík Chamber Orchestra and Iceland Symphony Orchestra. [darkmusicdays.is](http://darkmusicdays.is)

**Tine Thing Helseth** The Norwegian trumpeter will be at Harpa on Thursday 5 March with Yan Pascal Tortelier and the Iceland Symphony Orchestra. The programme will include Henri Tomasi's Trumpet Concerto and Tchaikovsky's First Symphony. [en.harpa.is](http://en.harpa.is)

**Nicola Benedetti** On Thursday 26 March the British violinist (left) will perform Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 5 with the Iceland Symphony Orchestra and guest conductor Hans Graf in Harpa's Eldborg auditorium. Also on the programme are works by Respighi and Hindemith. [en.harpa.is](http://en.harpa.is)





# BENJAMIN BRITTEN

## A wonderful Christmas presence

From childhood to his final years, Britten's love of celebrating at Christmas time resulted in a wealth of glorious festive works, as **Mervyn Cooke** discovers

**I**t's been a funny Christmas, the first I've ever spent without family or friends,' wrote Britten to a young correspondent from India in December 1955. 'Peter & I didn't even say "Happy Christmas" to anyone (except a curious couple who'd brought their caravan from England...).' Not even the splendour of the Taj Mahal, where Britten and Pears spent Christmas Day, could dispel their nostalgia for traditional yuletide festivities, which in Britten's case delighted him all his life.

Britten's childhood diaries reveal that, in their Lowestoft home, his family and friends enjoyed exactly the same seasonal pleasures as millions of others from year to year. Even after he'd left home to study at the Royal College of Music, the budding composer was always keen to return to Suffolk to go Christmas shopping, wrap up his presents, help decorate the local church, and participate in the annual family pantomime. Picking holly sprigs was a special pleasure, and it comes as no surprise that he later made two different arrangements of the carol *The Holly and the Ivy*. And carol-singing was a high point of the family year. On 23 December 1931, for example, just one month after his 18th birthday, Britten went carolling with his sister Beth, and told his diary: 'Got quite a lot of money – quite fun – tho' I'm hoarse now.'

On Christmas Eve two years later, he joined some local carol singers who by this stage had in their repertoire his own arrangement of *Unto us a Boy is Born*. Britten was not always enamoured of carol arrangements, however. He listened to the opening of Hely-Hutchinson's *Carol Symphony* (1927) on the radio three days before Christmas in 1933, and described it in his diary as 'utter bilge'. Some years later, he wrote his own set of orchestral variations on *God rest ye merry, gentlemen* (*Men of Goodwill*),

### BRITTEN'S STYLE

#### Master of words

The resourcefulness of Britten's musical interpretations of his texts is unmatched by any other British composer of vocal music. It reflects his self-confessed desire to 'restore to the musical setting of the English language a brilliance, freedom and vitality that have been curiously rare since the death of Purcell'.

#### Harmonic language

Even the simplest of musical ingredients, like a major triad, gain a remarkable new lease of life in Britten's distinctive tonal idiom. As composer Robin Holloway put it, Britten's music uniquely manages 'to connect the avant-garde with the lost paradise of tonality'.



borrowed melodies, also to be found in his Christmas music, arrangements of hymn tunes in dramatic works, and his realisations of Baroque repertoire (which include a striking but rarely staged version of *The Beggar's Opera*, above).

#### Structure and meaning

Even when tackling complex and ambiguous operatic subjects, the clarity of Britten's musical processes – especially his thematic and tonal logic – guide the listener purposefully through his interpretation of events without the need for specialised analytical expertise. At the same time, his music is subtle and sophisticated enough to keep professional analysts busy for the foreseeable future!

#### Canny arrangements

Britten's celebrated folksong arrangements are typical of his imaginative reworkings of borrowed melodies, also to be found in his Christmas music, arrangements of hymn tunes in dramatic works, and his realisations of Baroque repertoire (which include a striking but rarely staged version of *The Beggar's Opera*, above).

which was broadcast before the King's Christmas Day message in 1947.

Christmas was not always a happy time. Britten's father was mortally ill over Christmas 1933 (and must have been much on the composer's mind as he attempted to listen to Hely-Hutchinson's jolly festive piece), and he died the following April. Britten learned of the death of Alban Berg on Christmas Eve in 1935 – on a day when Britten had been delivering charity parcels of groceries and coal to impoverished families in Lowestoft – and the loss of his idol was to darken his mood for many months to come. The death of Britten's father is inextricably bound up with the first of the composer's great Christmas works, the virtuosic set of unaccompanied choral variations *A Boy Was Born*, which is dedicated to him. Sadly, Robert Britten was probably too unwell to hear the first broadcast of the piece in February 1934, and his two sons later chose part of it – the movement 'Jesu, as thou art our Saviour' – to be performed at his funeral.

*A Boy Was Born* was Britten's second attempt at a Christmas choral anthology, and came soon after a student work, written in early 1931 under the title *Thy King's Birthday* but now known as *Christ's Nativity*, which was to remain unperformed until its posthumous premiere in 1991. Two carols he composed as a teenager back in 1930, *A Wealden Trio* and *The Sycamore Tree*, also lay dormant for many years until he resurrected them for Imogen Holst in 1967. Coincidentally, in this same year he was – to use his own words – 'bullied... into writing a Xmas carol' for Peter Pears's sister Cicely, for the benefit of the Women's Institute. This was a setting of Hardy's poem *The Oxen* which was submitted as part of a WI competition to find an appropriate text. Britten appears to have forgotten his rash promise to write the carol, ►





# LIFE & TIMES

A quick guide to the main events in the life of Benjamin Britten

## THE LIFE

## 1913

## THE TIMES



### 1913

Benjamin Britten is born in **LOWESTOFT** on 22 November, the feast day of St Cecilia, patron saint of music. His mother is an amateur singer and his father is a dentist.

### 1924

Aged 11, his talent is recognised by composer **FRANK BRIDGE**, who privately tutors him, even when he later studies at the Royal Academy of Music.

### 1939

With tenor Peter Pears, Britten travels to the US on tour and to pursue a Hollywood film contract. Once war breaks out, they remain for three years.



### 1945

The premiere of **PETER GRIMES** proves a success, earning both popular and critical acclaim and making Britten a household name.



### 1957

He and Pears, now his life-partner, move into the Red House in Aldeburgh.

### 1962

His *War Requiem*, which combines

the words of the Latin Mass with poems by Wilfred Owen, is performed at the consecration of the new Coventry Cathedral.

### 1976

The first composer to be awarded the life peerage, he becomes Baron Britten of Aldeburgh in the County of Suffolk. He dies on 4 December, aged 63.

### 1914

English and German troops call a Christmas truce between the trenches, exchanging gifts as well as playing a game of football.

### 1924

Britain elects its first ever Labour government, led by prime minister Ramsay MacDonald. The government lasts for less than a year, but MacDonald returns in 1929.



### 1931

Coca-Cola launches an advertising campaign with **FATHER CHRISTMAS** as a bearded figure in red, helping to popularise the image of Santa that we know today.

### 1939

Banned from singing in Washington DC's Constitution Hall, African-American **MARIAN ANDERSON** performs to thousands in front of the Lincoln Memorial during the early years of the Civil Rights Movement.



### 1953

The coronation of Queen Elizabeth II is broadcast live across Britain.

### 1967

The 'Swinging Sixties' introduces a more liberal attitude throughout British society. Abortion and homosexuality are legalised.



### 1975

British rock group Queen release their fourth studio album, **A NIGHT AT THE OPERA**, which includes their famous single, 'Bohemian Rhapsody'.

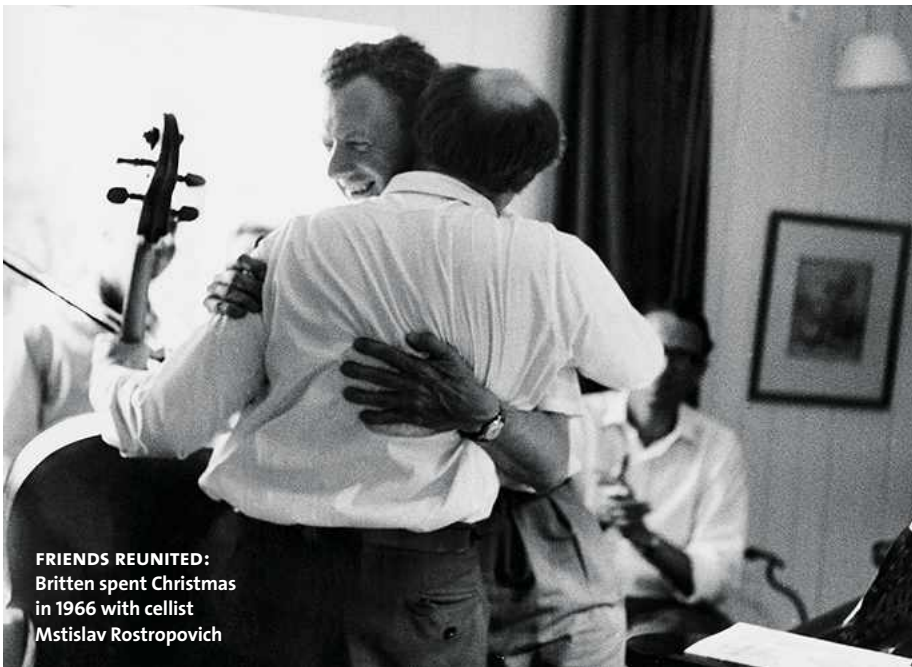
## 1976

and became increasingly annoyed with both the prospect and its commissioner's repeated reminders about it.

His first major Christmas project after *A Boy Was Born* was a far happier affair, the celebrated *A Ceremony of Carols* for high voices and harp, which he began writing on the voyage back home from his wartime sojourn in the US. Britten at first referred to the carols as being for children's voices; but the premiere, in December 1942, was given by a women's choir. Britten later framed his seven carols with a 'Procession' and 'Recession' (a symmetrical dramatic device encountered in many of his later works), based on a Christmas plainsong. In the following summer, he added a further carol and a new interlude for solo harp, and his preference for boys' voices was strengthened by several memorable performances in the run-up to Christmas by a group of 35 energetic Welsh lads from an underprivileged area of Swansea. The work was a popular hit, with the first edition of the score selling out after just one month on the market.

At around this time, Britten's old friend WH Auden was attempting to persuade him to write what would have been a strikingly original Christmas oratorio with a contemporary twist, under the title *For the Time Being*. Britten and Auden had previously ended their American operetta *Paul Bunyan* with a scene at a Christmas party, but this was an altogether bolder proposition. By now Britten's relationship with Pears was going from strength to strength, and the formerly intense friendship between composer and poet had cooled somewhat in consequence; but there is no doubt that, in spite of Auden's huge and impracticable conception of the work, Britten remained intrigued by the possibility of the project even after he had returned to the UK to begin his landmark opera *Peter Grimes*. As late as 1946 he wrote to his American confidante Elizabeth Mayer to say that Auden's text 'has got to be set, even if no one performs it. It'll probably last three evenings!' But it was not to be, and the only fragments of the libretto for which he wrote music survive as the texts of two carols composed for a BBC radio feature, *Poet's Christmas*, in 1944.

Nevertheless, Britten's fascination with all things yuletide soon bore fruit as a Christmas cantata. More accurately, it was a work not about Christmas as such, but about the legendary Saint Nikolaos of Myra, the Christian bishop and compulsive present-giver who is better known in popular culture as Santa Claus. The premiere of *Saint Nicolas* was the climax of the first concert of the inaugural Aldeburgh Festival in 1948, but the score had been commissioned by Lancing College and its 'official' premiere took place



**FRIENDS REUNITED:**  
Britten spent Christmas  
in 1966 with cellist  
Mstislav Rostropovich

there in the following month to celebrate the school's centenary. In addition to Nicolas's role as the College's patron saint, he is also the patron saint of children and mariners – two topics very close to Britten's heart – so the composer's enthusiasm for the project was inevitable, quite apart from the inescapable Christmas connection. As with *A Ceremony of Carols*, the cantata was an instant success with the public, and typified Britten's unique ability to bring together amateur performers and even the audience (via the means of collective hymn-singing) into a coherent musico-dramatic experience with widespread popular appeal.

If Britten did not overly enjoy his Christmas in India in 1955, this is not true of others he spent abroad, including one with Pears in his beloved Venice in 1969. He first sampled a traditional German (*émigré*) Christmas with the Mayers at Amityville in 1939, and in later years was given even more lavish Germanic treats at Schloss Wolfsgarten, the home of his friend Princess Margaret of Hesse. He wrote home from Wolfsgarten in January 1954 to say that 'The German Xmas was very romantic; very holy & serious, but inclined to be a bit sloppy & "heilige Nacht"'. No fewer than seven German princes attended the family Christmas dinner.

Christmas 1966, meanwhile, was spent in the Soviet Union as the guests of cellist Mstislav Rostropovich and his wife, with Shostakovich dropping in to help consume the goose, and all generally succumbing to generous quantities of rich food and vodka. On this occasion Shostakovich won the card game Happy Families, which Britten

loved to play at Christmas, and which he had previously played with the Rostropoviches when they spent Christmas at Aldeburgh three years before. Even when well into his 40s, Britten was trying to secure the services of a conjuror for his Christmas festivities – as so often with this composer, it was an indication of his undiminished joy in the traditions of childhood and the family warmth for which he constantly longed. Among his guests at The Red House over later Christmas periods were

## Britten longed for the traditions of childhood and family warmth

the novelist EM Forster (1964), who nearly froze to death when the central heating failed, and the Australian artist Sidney Nolan (1967).

Christmas Eve 1972 at The Red House was especially notable, for it was on this day that Britten finished the composition of his last opera, *Death in Venice*. As a preliminary try-out of the vocal qualities of the three singers he had in mind for the opera's principal roles, Britten had in 1971 composed *Journey of the Magi* (Canticle IV), a brilliant setting for vocal trio and piano of TS Eliot's strangely disconcerting account of the Three Wise Men's trek to Bethlehem.

Alas, Britten never lived to write a major stage work about Christmas, though he may once have toyed with the idea of turning Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* into an opera, and he occasionally contemplated a major Christmas work to be based on a sequence

of texts from the Chester mystery plays. This mystery-play project almost became a television opera in 1960, and again in 1967 when the BBC were keen to have a new Britten piece for the festive season, to rival the success of Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors* in the US. (Instead, they settled for Britten's televised performance of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*.)

In 1974 he revisited the mystery-play idea and was contemplating an ambitious libretto for a five-evening musico-dramatic cycle about the Nativity. The idea of a Christmas piece in which the soundworlds of *Noye's Fludde* and *Curlew River* might have come indelibly together is a fascinating thought... but also one of the great lost opportunities in the career of a composer for whom the festive season meant so much. ■

BBC  
RADIO



*Composer of the Week* is  
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Upcoming programmes are:

1-5 December *Lord Berners* (rpt)

8-12 December *Schumann*

15-19 December *André Previn*

22-26 December *Vivaldi*

29-31 December *Puccini*

## BENJAMIN BRITTEN

### RECOMMENDED RECORDINGS



#### Saint Nicolas

Andrew Kennedy (tenor);  
Choir of King's College,  
Cambridge etc/Cleobury  
Kings College KGS0003 £14.99  
Britten's cantata about the  
bishop who became the  
Santa Claus of yule legend.



#### A Boy Was Born etc

St Paul's Cathedral Choir,  
Holst Singers/Layton  
Hyperion 66825 £13.99  
From 1933, these virtuosic  
choral variations are coupled  
with the Christmas choral  
anthology, *Christ's Nativity*.



#### A Ceremony of Carols

Claire Jones (harp); National  
Youth Choir of Scotland etc/  
Christopher Bell  
Signum SIGCD228 £12.99  
Britten's well-loved work,  
performed (like its premiere  
in 1942) by female voices.



#### Canticles

Mark Padmore (ten), Julius  
Drake (piano) and others  
Wigmore Hall Live 0064 £10.99  
A live performance, including  
a setting of TS Eliot's *Journey  
of the Magi* (Canticle IV).



## BUILDING A LIBRARY

# SYMPHONY NO. 1

## Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Like the Russian snow itself, **Daniel Jaffé** lets his thoughts drift towards finding the finest available recordings of Tchaikovsky's 'Winter daydreams' symphony

Less than a year after graduating from the St Petersburg Conservatory, Tchaikovsky embarked on his First Symphony in March 1866. Then aged 25, he was teaching full-time at the Moscow Conservatory, so the pressure to prove himself worthy of this prestigious genre and the need to compose in his spare time led to many near-sleepless nights. Eventually published in 1874, the symphony inevitably shows the influence of composers he then admired. Mendelssohn was one of them, and his example of giving works descriptive titles led Tchaikovsky to name his own symphony's first two movements 'Daydreams of a winter journey' – hence the symphony's overall nickname, 'Winter daydreams' – and 'Land of gloom, land of mists'. Yet there are also several traits that are highly characteristic of its composer: lugubrious despair balanced by unfeigned joyousness, a haunting waltz, and even a horn motif which he reused over 20 years later in 'Waltz of the Flowers' for his Christmas-time ballet *The Nutcracker*.



### music CHOICE



**Neeme Järvi (conductor)**  
Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra (2002)  
BIS BIS-SACD-1398  
£13.99

## THE BEST RECORDING NEEME JÄRVI

THIS MAY NOT BE always faithful to the letter of Tchaikovsky's score, but Neeme Järvi (below) and the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra convey the spirit most eloquently, revealing its freshness, charm and inspired invention. As well as polished orchestral playing and immaculate ensemble, what makes this recording special, beyond their attention to so much detail in the score, is their imaginative characterisation of the music. The opening flute and bassoon theme is clearly articulated, with bird-like twitterings from the woodwind; and in the secondary theme, the clarinet solo – played with simple yet beguiling lyricism – is answered by cellos and violins with a song-like yet unforced ardour unmatched by any other recording. In the slow movement an

immaculate oboe solo is followed by imaginatively varied responses to Tchaikovsky's reiterations of its haunting theme, avoiding the monotony of so many other accounts; and its impassioned climax – a strong precursor of the famous *Swan Lake* theme – is handled artfully, the horns not starting *forte* but reserving their full might for its turbulent peak. The *Scherzo* is deftly characterised fairy music, while the trio's contrasting waltz, lushly orchestrated, conjures a ballroom with just a tinge of wistfulness. The only disappointment is the finale's slow opening – far too matter of fact here to provide effective contrast to the upbeat main *Allegro* section. But altogether, this is an exceptionally engaging performance, superbly recorded.







**BBC RADIO 3** Building a Library is broadcast on BBC Radio 3 at 9.30am each Saturday as part of *CD Review*. A highlights podcast is available at [www.bbc.co.uk/radio3](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3)

the 'Waltz of the Flowers' horn motif, the slow movement's muted string opening is lush, slow, and with a touch of Viennese portamento. To balance this is a thistledown *Scherzo*; then – a typical Karajan moment – a hesitant and doleful bass link to a poignant rendition of the waltz, making sense of the coda's final mournful recollection shadowed by the timpani's soft yet ominous thunder. The finale's sombre start is foil to a genuine sense of merrymaking, the Berlin players giving the Russian dance a real spring in its step, though the final hymn-like statement of the theme has a rather brash quality.



**Vladimir Jurowski (conductor)**  
London Philharmonic  
(2008, live)  
LPO 0039 £11.99

Vladimir Jurowski's detailed and clearly considered interpretation, combined with the London Philharmonic's polished playing, makes for a compelling account. Jurowski, though, does not invariably let the music flow in an inevitable progression: rather, he makes dramatic points by sometimes a hesitation, sometimes a dramatic change of tempo, or by deliberate articulation of a phrase. This can make structural and dramatic sense, as when he slows down at the start of the first movement's coda, preparing for a thrilling *accelerando*. The finale, though, does sound episodic, albeit it makes dramatic sense. There are other performances as idiosyncratic yet thought-through, but Jurowski's has the edge by giving due weight to both the dark and the optimistic sides of Tchaikovsky's genius.

## THREE MORE GREAT RECORDINGS



**Kurt Masur (conductor)**  
Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra (1989)  
Warner Apex 2564 61141-2  
£7.99

Given the young Tchaikovsky's admiration of Schumann and Mendelssohn, it is no surprise that German and Austrian musicians seem so at home in the symphony's idiom. Kurt Masur demonstrates an unerring knack of finding the right tempo throughout. The finale's Handel-like fugue, which can seem so awkward to Russian-trained conductors, here falls into stride with the movement's unforced, joyous atmosphere, and the main theme's hymn-like final appearance gains heart-

warming nobility through not being rushed. The Leipzig musicians make a fine sound, especially the horns in the slow movement, playing *fortissimo marcato* as requested in the score, yet sounding not brazen but with a full and noble tone. Only some slightly off tuning by some of the woodwind mars things a little.



**Herbert von Karajan (conductor)**  
Berlin Philharmonic (1979)  
DG 459 5182 £12.99

Karajan's sole recording of this symphony is a very affecting one. Though the first movement is relatively swift and straightforward, with just a touch of tenderness for

## AND ONE TO AVOID...



**Mikhail Pletnev and the Russian National Symphony Orchestra** have made some superb Tchaikovsky discs, most famously their debut recording of the Sixth

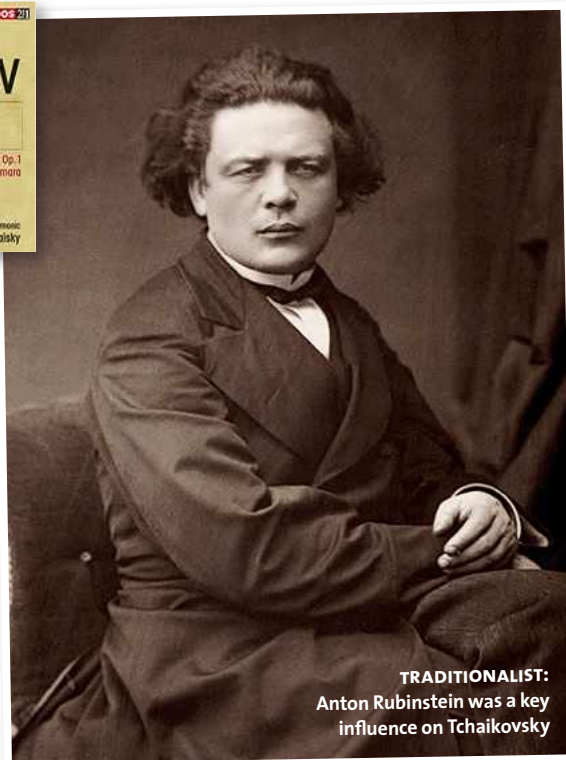
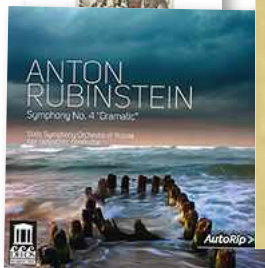
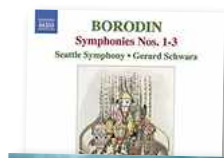
Symphony. Neither of their two attempts to record the First, though, are of that standard. The recording on the Pentatone label captures a perverse performance: speeds far slower than the metronome marks in the score result in portentous pauses followed by unassuming melodic ideas. The finale sounds vacuously bombastic.

If you enjoy Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 1 and would like to try out similar works, see overleaf...



## SO, WHERE NEXT...?

We suggest works to explore after Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 1



**TRADITIONALIST:**  
Anton Rubinstein was a key influence on Tchaikovsky

**Tchaikovsky The Storm**

In his First Symphony, Tchaikovsky reused bits and pieces from his student days, not least the tune from the third movement of his C-sharp minor Piano Sonata. Another 'borrow' was the beautiful 'Katerina' theme that appears, played by the flutes, in *The Storm*, an overture he'd written in 1864. For his Symphony No. 1, the theme is reworked for the violins and transposed into a different key for the opening of the second movement. Based on a play by Ostrovsky, *The Storm* is about a woman who has an affair but, as the heavens open, is overwhelmed by guilt. The 'Katerina' moment of calm aside, the work races along, with surging strings accompanied by loud timpani thunder rolls.

**Recommended recording:**

**Gothenburg Symphony/Neeme Järvi**  
BIS BISSACD1418 (SACD) £13.99

**A Rubinstein Symphony No. 4**

Hanging over Tchaikovsky as he wrote his First Symphony was the shadow of his teacher: Anton Rubinstein (above), virtuoso pianist, founder of the St Petersburg Conservatoire and a prolific composer himself. A traditionalist of the German school, hints of Mendelssohn and Schumann pervade much of Rubinstein's work, and he had little time for the artistic trend towards Russian nationalism. But by no means does traditional mean dull. Try, for instance, the glorious horn tune around which the first movement of his 1874 Fourth Symphony, 'The Dramatic', is spun. The frisky *Scherzo* that follows, meanwhile, is charm itself and, dare we say it, remarkably Russian-sounding.

**Recommended recording:** State Symphony Orchestra of Russia/Igor Golovchin  
Delos DRD2012 £13.99

**Balakirev Symphony No. 1**

On the other side of the fence from Rubinstein was Mily Balakirev, lover of all things Russian and the man who brought together the

nationalist composers group, 'The Five'. As a composer, he took an inordinately long time to complete anything – his First Symphony may have been begun in 1864, but he didn't get round to dotting the final crotchets until 1897. Worth the wait? Largely yes, even if the lengthy third movement does tread water a little. The perky *Allegro moderato* fourth, in contrast, is a riot of unmistakably Russian colour – among Balakirev's inspirations here was a song that he is said to have heard being sung by a blind beggar.

**Recommended recording:**

**BBC Philharmonic/Vassily Sinaisky**  
Chandos CHAN241-29 £13.99

**Rimsky-Korsakov Symphony No. 1**

The impetus for Rimsky-Korsakov's First Symphony came from Balakirev, who was acting as his informal tutor. Rimsky began the symphony in 1861 under Balakirev's close guidance before being called for peacetime service on a warship. He was able to dedicate swathes of free time to composing and, like Tchaikovsky, looked to Mendelssohn for inspiration, buying scores of his works, as well as those of Beethoven and Schumann, every time the ship docked. Like Tchaikovsky's First, Rimsky-Korsakov's opens with beautiful, melancholic melodies, interrupted by exuberant brass and wind

passages throughout. Rimsky-Korsakov later revised the symphony, transposing it from the original key of E-flat minor into E minor.

**Recommended recording:**

**Gothenburg Symphony/Neeme Järvi**  
Deutsche Grammophon 459 5122  
£13.99

**Kalinnikov Symphony No. 1**

When Vasily Kalinnikov wrote his First Symphony in 1894-85 he may well have had in mind Tchaikovsky's own symphonic debut. As well as sharing an irresistible charm, both are also in the key of G minor and make use of folk-inspired melodies. There's something of Tchaikovsky's sparkle in the opening of Kalinnikov's slow movement, too, with gently rocking first violin and harp punctuated by dots of colour from the wind and horns. And the lyricism and irrepressible spirit of the first movement melody, with pizzicato accompaniment, could come straight out of Tchaikovsky, as could the oboe melody that flowers in the second movement.

**Recommended recording:**

**Czech Philharmonic Orchestra/Kazuki Yamada**  
Exton OVCL00487 £28.99

**Borodin Symphony No. 1**

It seems Borodin had almost as much trouble with his debut symphony as did Tchaikovsky. Published a good ten years after Tchaikovsky's First and taking almost five years to write, Borodin's Symphony No. 1 was completed around 1867. It begins in a similar way to its predecessor, with string tremolos providing a chilly accompaniment to a lugubrious opening theme but, also like Tchaikovsky, Borodin soon lightens the mood with one of Russian music's most uplifting tunes, one that could have easily come straight from his colleague's own hand. After a thrilling, skittish *Scherzo* and beautiful *Andante*, however, Borodin seems to have turned to Robert Schumann for inspiration: the finale is unmistakably Germanic (and none the worse for it).

**Recommended recording:**

**Seattle Symphony/Gerard Schwarz**  
Naxos 8.572786 £7.99

**Next month:**

*Durufle's Requiem*



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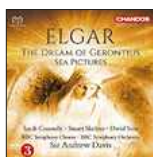


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Susan Tomes on a life in chamber music

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### Recording of the Month

Sir Andrew Davis conducts Stuart Skelton, Sarah Connolly, David Soar and the BBC Symphony forces in a powerful performance of Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*, p60



**ENJOYING ELGAR:**  
Sir Andrew Davis listens  
back to *Gerontius* at the  
recording session

## Fresh sounds for the festive season

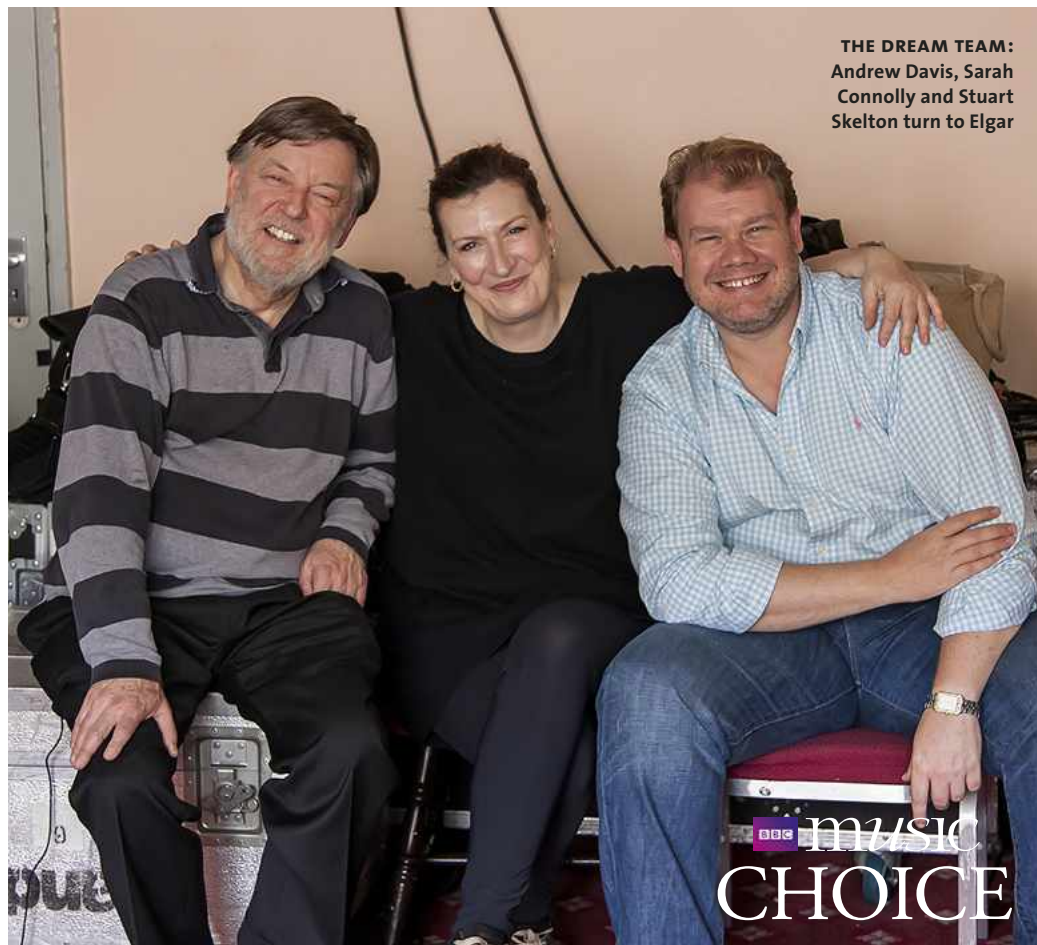


Christmas is a good time for new music and musical discoveries. It seems to me that every year brings a wealth of ear-catching, freshly composed carols and little-known gems, alongside the traditional favourites. It's often a chance for choirs to add a distinctive twist to a Christmas recording or service, and composers as diverse as John Rutter and Thomas Adès, Tansy Davies and Thea Musgrave have all recently written seasonal numbers. In fact our Christmas Choice this year, an album from Worcester College Choir, Oxford and Stephen Farr, features no fewer than nine world premieres (p62), as well as rarely heard music by Howells and Rubbra. Merry Christmas! **Rebecca Franks** *Reviews Editor*

Our Recording of the Month features in one of the **BBC Music Magazine** podcasts free from iTunes or [www.classical-music.com](http://www.classical-music.com)



# RECORDING OF THE MONTH



**THE DREAM TEAM:**  
Andrew Davis, Sarah  
Connolly and Stuart  
Skelton turn to Elgar

## FURTHER LISTENING

*Sir Andrew Davis*

### ELGAR

#### The Starlight Express

Elin Manahan Thomas, Roderick Williams, Simon Callow; SCO/Davis  
Chandos CHSA 5111 131:06 mins

**BBC Music Direct** £20.99 (2 discs)



'While the lyrics tend to the arch or winsome, most of the music is vintage light Elgar, and

beautifully performed. This is a very valuable addition to the Elgar discography.' *January 2013*

### ELGAR

#### Cello Concerto; Introduction and Allegro; Elegy for Strings; Pomp and Circumstance Marches Nos 1-5

Paul Watkins (cello); BBC Phil/Davis  
Chandos CHAN 10709 74:44 mins

**BBC Music Direct** £13.99



'There are times when a recording of a popular classic comes along that's so fresh, understanding

and heartfelt that it demands to be approached solely on its own terms. Paul Watkins's Elgar Cello Concerto is firmly in that class.' *July 2012*

### ELGAR

#### Symphonies Nos 1 & 2

Philharmonia Orchestra/Andrew Davis  
Signum SIGCD179 111:46 mins (2 discs)

**BBC Music Direct** £14.99



'They are superb performances, with plenty of electricity and sense of occasion, well

deserving the enthusiastic audience applause. The sublime and tragic *Larghetto* of No. 2 in particular is wonderfully well-paced.' *June 2010*

## A *Gerontius* for modern times

Sir Andrew Davis is at the top of his Elgarian game, finds *Terry Blain*



### ELGAR

#### The Dream of Gerontius; Sea Pictures

Sarah Connolly (mezzo-soprano); Stuart Skelton (tenor); David Soar (bass); BBC Symphony Chorus & Orchestra/ Sir Andrew Davis

Chandos CHSA 5140 (hybrid CD/SACD)  
124:47 mins (2 discs)

**BBC Music Direct** £28.99

Andrew Davis has made excellent Elgar recordings in the past, but this

is surely the finest. It's also among the best *Gerontius* performances on record. Davis resists the temptation to make the work sound like a flabby, imitation *Parsifal* and the results are outstandingly convincing, not least because he conducts with an infallible sense of flow and logic, and a steady, seasoned grasp of architecture.

Australian Stuart Skelton has sung Grimes, Siegmund and Parsifal, so has the heft and stamina for *Gerontius*'s most dramatic moments. He's too intelligent a singer, however, to belt them out operatically. 'Take

me away', for instance, is ardent yet vulnerable, yet he is wonderfully sensitive in 'I went to sleep' at the start of Part Two, while remaining virile and sharply attentive to the narrative. Davis and the orchestra

are superb here too, conjuring diaphanous textures in the transfigured, otherworldly introduction.

Sarah Connolly gives a strongly characterised reading of the Angel's music and her 'Softly and gently' is envelopingly tender without, crucially, becoming matronly. But there are moments where her vibrato

### Tenor Stuart Skelton is ardent yet vulnerable as Gerontius

spreads over-generously, and in the coupled *Sea Pictures* she is perhaps a touch becalmed and underprojected.

Bass David Soar is unwaveringly authoritative as both Priest and Angel of the Agony, making a stirring, compassionate contribution. In 'Proficiscere, anima Christiana' he manages to avoid pomposity while enlivening the sound, an effect sustained and intensified when the choir joins in force at 'Go, in the name of Angels'.



The BBC Symphony Chorus, expertly primed by Stephen Jackson, are unfailingly committed and sensitive, adding hugely to the impact of the performance. Their first entry, 'Kyrie eleison', is raptly hushed and concentrated, riveting the attention. The string of fugal imitations initiated at 'Holy Mary, pray for him' is lovingly contoured and caressing.

The performers benefit from a superbly balanced recording, whose power and amplitude are particularly evident on SACD and in high-resolution download format. The choral detail is specially impressive, with antiphonal effects precisely defined and located without resort to close-miking. A satisfying, consistent

sense of hall ambience contributes to the overall sense of occasion.

This *Gerontius* is a wonderful achievement, a deeply considered interpretation whose convincing spirituality never seems stuffy or over-reverential. It takes an honoured place among the finest-ever versions of this much-recorded masterpiece, and would unquestionably be my preferred digital version.

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★



#### ON THE PODCAST

Hear excerpts and a discussion of this recording on the **BBC Music Magazine podcast**, available free on iTunes or at [www.classical-music.com](http://www.classical-music.com)

## Q&A

### SIR ANDREW DAVIS

REBECCA FRANKS *talks to the British conductor about his first encounter with Elgar's The Dream of Gerontius*



**To celebrate being 70 this year, you chose to conduct Elgar's oratorios; what does *Gerontius* mean to you?**

*The Dream of Gerontius* is one of the great oratorios, and right up there with Handel's *Messiah*. I remember first hearing it at the Proms when I was about 14. I was deeply affected by it, and saved up the money I was earning from my paper round to buy it on LP. But it was a two-LP set and I only had enough money for one. So I became immensely familiar with Part One of *Gerontius* and the start of Part Two, but never bought the second LP. It's incomplete to this day.

#### What are the challenges of conducting this piece?

There's the challenge of coordinating these enormous forces but that's just fun. Here it's about finding the architectural shape of the piece and giving it a sense of momentum. Part One is fairly straightforward actually, but it's important to get the proportions of Part Two right and find the right tempos. 'The Angel's Farewell' at the end can sound trivial if it's too fast and lugubrious if it's too slow. It needs a perfect sense of repose and ecstatic glow. It's supremely hopeful and full of promise, which is a wonderful message whatever your religious beliefs.

#### How bold a move was it by Elgar to set a Catholic text?

Being Catholic meant being outside the British establishment, and to write this for a major British choral festival, in Birmingham, was an unusual choice. The idea of man finding himself in Purgatory after his death was abhorrent to most Anglicans. But Newman's poem was something that meant a lot to Elgar personally. The *Enigma Variations* is fabulous but somehow with *Gerontius* Elgar found his voice.

## THIS MONTH'S CRITICS

*Our critics number many of the top music specialists whose knowledge and enthusiasm are second to none*



#### John Allison

editor, *Opera*; critic, *Sunday Telegraph*

John Allison was born in Cape Town and studied for his doctorate while playing the organ at Cape Town Cathedral.

The editor of *Opera* magazine, he has contributed to publications around the world. Before joining *The Telegraph* he spent 10 years on *The Times*.

**Nicholas Anderson**  
Baroque specialist

**Terry Blain** writer

**Kate Bolton**

lecturer, New York University, Florence

**Garry Booth** jazz

writer & critic

**Geoff Brown**

critic, *The Times*

**Anthony Burton**

writer, editor

**Michael Church**

critic, *The Independent*

**Christopher Cook**

broadcaster, critic

**Martin Cotton**

radio & recording

producer

**Christopher Dingle**

Professor of Music,

Birmingham

Conservatoire

**Misha Donat**

producer, writer

**Jessica Duchén**

critic, novelist

**Hilary Finch**

critic, *The Times*

**George Hall** writer,

editor, translator

**Malcolm Hayes**

biographer,

composer

**Julian Haylock**

writer, editor

**Ivan Hewett**

broadcaster, critic

**Daniel Jaffé**

writer, critic

**Erica Jeal** deputy

editor, *Opera*; critic,

*The Guardian*

**Stephen Johnson**

writer, BBC Radio 3

broadcaster

**Berta Joncus** senior

lecturer, University

of London

**Erik Levi** professor,

University of London

**Max Loppert**

critic, *Opera*

**Andrew McGregor**

presenter, BBC

Radio 3's CD Review

**David Nice**

writer, biographer

**Roger Nichols**

French music

specialist

**Bayan Northcott**

composer, writer

**Tim Parry**

writer, editor

**Anna Picard**

writer, critic

**George Pratt**

emeritus professor

of music, University

of Huddersfield

**Anthony Pryer**

lecturer, Goldsmiths

College, London

**Paul Riley** journalist

**Michael Scott**

Rohan author,

editor

**Nick Shave**

journalist, writer

**Jeremy Siepmann**

biographer, editor

**Jan Smaczny**

professor of music,

Queen's, Belfast

**Geoffrey Smith**

presenter,

BBC Radio 3

**Michael Tanner**

critic, *The Spectator*

**Roger Thomas** critic

**Kate Wakeling**

writer, researcher

**Helen Wallace**

consultant editor,

BBC Music

**Barry Witherden**

critic, writer

**Key to symbols** Star ratings are provided for both the performance itself and either the recording's sound quality or a DVD's presentation

**Outstanding** ..... ★★★★★  
**Excellent** ..... ★★★★  
**Good** ..... ★★★  
**Disappointing** ..... ★★  
**Poor** ..... ★

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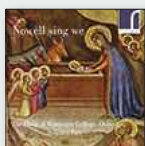
# CHRISTMAS CHOICE

*Terry Blain* picks the best of this year's crop, including traditional fare from King's College, Cambridge, and several imaginative albums ranging from Baroque to the best of contemporary

## BBC MUSIC CONCERTO CHOICE

### Refreshingly new carols

*Terry Blain* admires the originality of Worcester College Choir



#### NOWELL SING WE

**Contemporary Carols, Vol. 2:**  
works by Jackson, Rubbra,  
L Berkeley, Bennett, J Scott,  
C Matthews, Howells, Maxwell  
Davies, Swayne, Moore,  
Hallgrímsson, Pott, Finnissy etc  
Choir of Worcester College, Oxford/  
Stephen Farr (organ)  
Resonus RES 10138 72:35 mins

Available [www.resonusclassics.com](http://www.resonusclassics.com)

Eighteen carols, most by living composers, half of them world premiere recordings – would that all new Christmas issues were as fresh and enterprising as this one! There isn't a routine setting among them, and many are strikingly successful. The rhythmic buoyancy of Gabriel Jackson's *Nowell sing we*, opening

#### If only all Christmas albums were as fresh and enterprising!

the programme, is immediately invigorating. *The Virgin's Cradle Hymn*, the brief, tender setting by Rubbra which follows, strongly evocative. Both selections highlight the sterling contribution of the Worcester College Choir, who bring vernal tone and a naturally flowing sense of phrasing to their singing. Those qualities are specially evident in John Scott's *Nova! nova!*, where the text is parsed with pleasing attention to meaning and syntax, without compromising spontaneity. The unison singing at the opening of Howells's *O mortal man* has



**FLUID YET DISCIPLINED:**  
Stephen Farr directs well-contrasted performances

delectable fluidity and tenderness, while among the first recordings Grayston Ives's *This is the record of John*, alternating plainsong recitative with sharp, harmonised interjections, is a particularly striking conception.

Seven *O Antiphon Preludes* for organ by Nico Muhly provide agreeable punctuation points in the recital. The recording is available in a variety of download formats.

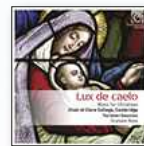
All sound excellent, with the studio quality FLAC version possessing exceptional amplitude and beauty of detail.

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★



#### ON THE WEBSITE

Hear extracts from this recording and the rest of this month's choices on the **BBC Music Magazine website** [www.classical-music.com](http://www.classical-music.com)

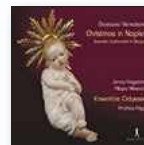


#### LUX DE CAELO

**Works by JS Bach, Mendelssohn, Britten, Praetorius, Pettman, Ross, Mathias, Rutter, Schoenberg, Swayne, Tavener, Vaughan Williams, Webern & Willcocks**  
Choir of Clare College, Cambridge;  
Dmitri Ensemble/Graham Ross  
Harmonia Mundi HMU 907615  
68:05 mins

**BBC Music Direct** £14.99  
Mathias's *A babe is born* typifies the choir's nimble alacrity, crisply accompanied by the Dmitri Ensemble. Praetorius's *Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern* elicits piping contributions from five soloists, with a lilting theorbo. Textures are a little stretched in Tavener's *A Hymn to the Mother of God*, and *Riu, riu, chiu*, sounds a touch well-mannered. Bravely, though, the CD ends with Schoenberg's *Friede auf Erden*, preceded by Rutter's *Nativity Carol*, possibly the first juxtaposition of these two composers on record.

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★



#### CHRISTMAS IN NAPLES

**Works by A Scarlatti and Veneziano**  
Jenny Högström (soprano), Filippo Mineccia (countertenor); Ensemble  
Odyssee/Andrea Friggi  
Pan Classics PC 10307 71:06 mins

**BBC Music Direct** £14.99

Soprano Jenny Högström makes a vibrant impression in Gaetano Veneziano's *Notturmo*, which opens this selection of music for Holy Week from 17th-century Naples. The piece's eight brief movements, setting texts relating to Christ's birth, pass in a jiffy, and are springily accompanied here on period instruments. Countertenor Filippo Mineccia is





scarcely less impressive in his own *Notturmo*, and a couple of perky concertos by Alessandro Scarlatti punctuate the vocal pieces. Jolliest of all are the outer movements of the concluding *Pastorale* by Veneziano, framing an unexpectedly affecting countertenor aria.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★



## VENETIAN CHRISTMAS

Works by Hasse, Perotti, Torelli & Vivaldi

Ruby Hughes (soprano); Arte dei Suonatori/Martin Gessler  
BIS BIS-2099 (hybrid CD/SACD) 74 mins  
BBC Music Direct £13.99

Some tenuous theming here, but who cares when the music-making – tart and spicy on period instruments – is so appealing? The psalter, tinklingly festive in its connotations, features in a merry sonata by Perotti and an aria and concerto by Vivaldi. The latter's *Salve Regina* and Hasse's *Alma Redemptoris Mater* explore Marian themes in alluring performances, vibrantly delivered by soprano Ruby Hughes. Baroque violinist Ewa Golinska sings sweetly in Vivaldi's Concerto RV 266, which is not especially Christmassy, and the disc ends with a Concerto Grosso by Torelli, which somehow is.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★



## SING THEE NOWELL

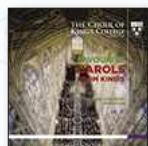
Carols and motets by Bennett, Byttinger, Clemens, Craig, McGlynn, Pygott, Redner, Scott, Smith, Verdelot, Victoria, Warlock, Wesley & Williams

New York Polyphony  
BIS BIS-2099 (hybrid CD/SACD) 71:17 mins  
BBC Music Direct £13.99

The all-male New York Polyphony sing one-to-a-part, which gives a particular sense of purity and chasteness to their Christmas selection. The four voices blend beautifully in Andrew Smith's arrangement of the Advent hymn *Veni, Emmanuel*, exhibiting a wide variety of dynamic shadings and variegations. There is much emotion in their singing too, in the lulling tenderness of Andrew Craig's *Sleep*

*Now*, Warlock's *Bethlehem Down*, and in the Five Carols of Richard Rodney Bennett, augmented by two sopranos. The vocal blend is consistently velvety, the pitching unerringly accurate.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★



## FAVOURITE CAROLS FROM KING'S

Selection of traditional carols  
Choir of King's College, Cambridge/  
Stephen Cleobury  
King's College KGS 0007 78:11 mins  
(CD; also available on DVD)

BBC Music Direct £10.99

Another year, another King's College Christmas collection. The choir's glory remains its boy trebles, whose gleaming descants, vibrato-free production and tonal freshness are invariably the icing on the cake in these typically polished, debonair performances. The other voice-parts are not quite so homogeneously blended or synchronised, but that won't bother lovers of the King's sound, and the comfortable, reassuring ambience imparted by the acoustic of the College Chapel. The result is the equivalent of seasonal comfort listening, one familiar tune after another warming the senses as mulled wine warms the palate.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★



## CHRISTMAS WITH THE SHEPHERDS

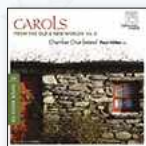
Works by Morales, Mouton & Stabile

The Marian Consort/Rory McCleery  
Delphian DCD 34145 62:55 mins  
BBC Music Direct £14.99

An interesting programme, tracing the influence of French composer Jean Mouton's nativity motet *Quaeramus cum pastoribus*, notably in the imitation Mass written by Morales. Both works are mellifluously performed here by the seven members of the youthful Marian Consort, who shape the sinuous polyphony with winning pliability. Also included are Mouton's joyful Christmas motet *Puer natus est nobis*, and another, more complex treatment for double choir of

*Quaeramus cum pastoribus* by Stabile. Rory McCleery sings countertenor and directs the Consort with a pleasing feeling for euphonious balances and forward momentum.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★



## CAROLS FROM THE OLD & NEW WORLDS

Music from Ireland, USA & Britain  
Chamber Choir Ireland/Paul Hillier  
Harmonia Mundi HMU 807610 (hybrid CD/SACD) 60:18 mins

BBC Music Direct £14.99

Volume three in a series, and the first to feature the excellent Chamber Choir Ireland, of which Paul Hillier is director. Half of the arrangements are Hillier's, and his vast experience is evident in the choir's brightly communicative performances, which wear their technical adroitness lightly. Henry Cowell's *Sweet was the Song*, Gerald Barry's *Carol* and a pair of Irish language carols are among the discoveries here, while *Behold a silly tender babe*, Hillier's matching of Robert Southwell's poem to the tune 'On Raglan Road' is sung to, is memorably effective.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★



## THE WONDER OF CHRISTMAS

Selection of carols  
Elora Festival Singers/Noel Edison  
Naxos 8.573421 59:20 mins

BBC Music Direct £7.99

Christmas in Canada, courtesy of this silk-toned, impeccably mannered ensemble of adult singers. The Elora's airiness and ease of voice production is very noticeable, with excellent enunciation. This enhances enjoyment of story-carols such as Paul Halley's arrangement of *What Child is This?* and Bob Chilcott's of *Awake in a Manger*. With many less familiar items, and a dash of Americana – the Appalachian *I Wonder as I Wander* – this is a refreshing alternative to the English collegiate and cathedral tradition.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★

## REISSUES

Reviewed by Terry Blain

### JS BACH

Christmas Oratorio

Thomanerchor, Leipzig; Gewandhaus Orchestra/Georg Christoph Biller  
Rondeau Production ROP 4042  
65:48 mins

BBC Music Direct £9.99



Excerpts from Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*, the highlight being the vibrant sound of the Thomanerchor, the all-boy choir of the church where Bach was cantor. Classy support from the Gewandhausorchester.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★

### BAROQUE CHRISTMAS

Cantatas and Motets by CPE Bach, JCF Bach, JS Bach, JC Bach, WF Bach, Buxtehude, P Esterházy, Finale, Geist, Porpora and Telemann  
Ruth Ziesak, Wilfried Jochens, Klaus Mertens; Various choirs and orchestras  
Capriccio C 5217 134:25 mins

BBC Music Direct £13.99 (2 discs)



Seasonal motets and cantatas by Christian Geist, Pál Esterházy, Buxtehude, and Giuseppe Maria

Pò del Finale, with a tranche of contributions from Bach family members. Thoroughly engaging.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★

### A CAIUS CHRISTMAS

Selection of carols, including music by Poulenc, Hewitt Jones, Karg-Elert, Parsons, Vilette, Walton and Webber  
Choir of Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge/Geoffrey Webber  
Delphian DCD 34152 63:28 mins

BBC Music Direct £14.99



Geoffrey Webber's 'dream Christmas programme' enjoys superb sound, and singing burgeoning with colour and confidence.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★

### ON CHRISTMAS NIGHT

Works by Britten, Pearsall etc

Armonico Consort/Christopher Monks  
Signum SIGCD 386 69:53 mins

BBC Music Direct £12.99



Intimate, small-scale performances of mainly familiar titles – including Britten's *Ceremony of Carols* – by a choir of ten singers. Occasionally more heft is needed.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★



# ORCHESTRAL

*Edward Gardner's* Janáček series gets off to an impressive start; while *Thomas Dausgaard's* Schubert cycle comes to an exhilarating end; plus Berlioz on Blu-ray audio from the *LSO*

## MUSIC ORCHESTRAL CHOICE

### Fresh and daring Nielsen

*Anthony Burton* admires Alan Gilbert's vision of the symphonies



**POWERFUL PLAYERS:**  
Alan Gilbert and the  
New York Philharmonic



#### NIELSEN

##### Symphonies Nos 1 & 4

New York Philharmonic/Alan Gilbert  
Dacapo 6.220624 (hybrid CD/SACD)  
69:22 mins

**BBC Music Direct £13.99**

'Music is life and, like it, inextinguishable,' Nielsen's explanation of the title of his Fourth Symphony is also a key to the interpretation of the work. Alan Gilbert succeeds in suggesting the force underlying its progress through changing landscapes towards the thrilling conclusion with two battling timpanists. The New York Philharmonic

players respond collectively and as individuals. Handovers between string sections are at daringly quiet dynamic levels and are almost imperceptible. The woodwind combine to produce a fresh, well-blended sonority in the pastoral second movement; but in the

#### Alan Gilbert suggests the force underlying the Fourth Symphony

transition to the finale the first oboist gives a personal twist to his solo. The live recording in Avery Fisher Hall builds up a powerful sound-picture from the individual contributions, rather than offering an integrated tutti sound; in stereo, the violins seem oddly disembodied.

The early First Symphony is no makeweight. For all its momentary

echoes of Brahms and Dvořák, it's full of Nielsen's characteristic turns of melody and harmony and his volatile transitions, framed in one of his purposeful key-schemes. Gilbert interprets it flexibly and sympathetically, and is again rewarded by wholehearted playing.

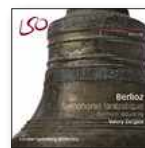
Dacapo's cycle is due to end next year, to mark the 150th anniversary of Nielsen's birth: after the first two impressive instalments, I'm already impatient to hear how Gilbert and the Philharmonic tackle the towering Fifth and the enigmatic Sixth Symphonies.

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★



#### ON THE WEBSITE

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[www.classical-music.com](http://www.classical-music.com)



#### BERLIOZ

##### *Symphonie fantastique*; *Waverley Overture*

London Symphony Orchestra/  
Valery Gergiev

LSO Live LSO 0757 (hybrid CD/SACD; Pure Audio Blu-ray disc) 65:35 mins (per disc)

**BBC Music Direct £10.99**

The question is why? Duplications may be normal for record companies, but this new LSO Live recording of the *Symphonie fantastique* sits in their catalogue alongside a front-rank performance under the baton of arguably the finest of all Berlioz conductors, Sir Colin Davis. Nonetheless there is room for other perspectives and Valery Gergiev has plenty of insights. Moreover, while the Davis recording is a CD, albeit finely recorded (LSO 0007), this new version not only includes a hybrid SACD, but also marks LSO Live's first Pure Audio Blu-ray release. For good measure, as well as the high-quality surround-sound recording, there is additional video footage of the symphony. Sonically, then, this is in a different class from the Davis disc, but it is marginally less exulted as a performance.

The playing from the London Symphony Orchestra is, as so often, exceptionally refined, yet very much alive and full of colour in both the *Symphonie fantastique* and the accompanying *Waverley Overture* (whose plaintive opening oboe call comes barely ten seconds after the frenzied final pages of the 'Witches Sabbath'). Under Gergiev, there is an exceptional hush to the *Symphonie fantastique's* opening, while moments of bombast are driven relentlessly. However, there is a slight stiffness to the rhythms when 'Un bal' springs into life, and the Stravinskian heft given to the string interruptions in the opening movement becomes wearing. By contrast, Davis is always lithe and nuanced, somehow eliciting



a diaphanous glow even in forceful moments and charming the ear whatever the format.

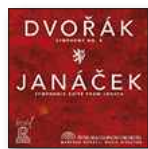
*Christopher Dingle*

PERFORMANCE

★★★★

RECORDING

★★★★★



## DVOŘÁK

### Symphony No. 8

### JANÁČEK

#### Jenůfa (suite)

Pittsburgh Symphony/Manfred Honeck

Reference Recordings FR-710SACD

62:04 mins

BBC Music Direct

£13.99

Even though Dvořák's Eighth Symphony is not as popular as the celebrated *New World* (No. 9), you would have thought that a production company responsible for a new CD of the work would get its key right. It is quite definitely in G major, not E minor. Luckily there are things to admire in Manfred Honeck's performance and certainly much of it is beautifully played.

However, his approach to tempo in the first movement leads to anomalies; in fact, the first few pages seem far too much like a slow introduction, which was certainly not Dvořák's intention. There is too much that is episodic about the way in which Honeck allows the movement to develop, leading to a recapitulation that is simply raucous rather than powerful. The slow movement fares better with some sumptuous string tone, but the third movement seems almost thrown away, with barely a hint of its captivating but understated poignancy. The finale is a strange mix of pomposity and brashness, particularly in the unresonant recorded sound here.

The *Jenůfa* symphonic suite is similarly overstated. The dance-based numbers certainly have swing, but there is little overall coherence in relation to the drama. The close of the suite has the terrifying metaphysical crisis from the end of the second Act followed immediately by the finale of the third, but without a replacement for the vocal lines there is precious little sense of catharsis. For those wanting a performance of Dvořák's Eighth, Charles Mackerras with the London Philharmonic Orchestra remains the safest pair of hands by far. *Jan Smaczny*

PERFORMANCE

★★

RECORDING

★★★★



**CAPRICIOUS GAMES:**  
Jean-Efflam Bavouzet  
finds drama in Janáček



## FOULDS

### Volume 4: Carnival; The Vision of Dante Prelude; Lento e Scherzetto; Saint Joan Suite; Hippolytus Prelude, Op. 84 No. 1; Puppet Ballet Suite; Badinage; Grand Durbar March

BBC Concert Orchestra/Ronald Corp  
Dutton Epoch CDLX 7311 72:10 mins

BBC Music Direct

£13.99

With the death in May of John Foulds's pioneer champion, mover and shaker, the critic Malcolm (Calum) MacDonald, a shadow has fallen over this album, to which he contributed two performing editions and part of the booklet note. But no clouds ever darken the music. This is a particularly exuberant addition to Dutton's ongoing series devoted to this early 20th-century British maverick, whose adventurous and genial imagination illuminates all the lighter items here, often inspired by the theatre.

Only one work, the subtly shaped incidental music from Shaw's play *Saint Joan*, has been recorded before. Foulds fanatics should be tickled especially by the magnificently sepulchral, Wagnerian prelude from *The Vision of Dante*, a 'concert opera' finished in 1908 and still awaiting a public performance. But every track delights one way or another, from the early *Lento e Scherzetto* (the melodious torso of a cello concerto), through the fetching and Frenchified *Puppet Ballet Suite* to the East-West sandwich of the *Grand Durbar March*, a curio from Foulds's last years in India.

Ronald Corp and the BBC Concert Orchestra pitch in with gusto and lovely bright colours – just the job for a composer pointedly cherished by MacDonald for his 'musical optimism' and 'zest for life'.

*Geoff Brown*

PERFORMANCE

★★★★

RECORDING

★★★★



## JANÁČEK

### Orchestral Works, Vol. 1: Sinfonietta; Capriccio; The Cunning Little Vixen (suite)

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet (piano);  
Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra/  
Edward Gardner

Chandos CHSA 5142 (hybrid CD/SACD)  
64:05 mins

BBC Music Direct

£13.99

Orchestral music is a powerful strand in Janáček's output. In this first of a complete series, we have a fine interpreter of Janáček and a distinguished orchestra. The headline work is the *Sinfonietta* whose complex of inspirations – military band music, mass gymnastics, the Moravian capital Brno and the new Czechoslovak nation itself – are beautifully explained in John Tyrrell's accompanying notes. The opening fanfares are on the fast side and the end is not really overwhelming. Orchestral ensemble is good though not always the intonation. Still, the remaining movements are more compelling, with vivid orchestral playing, including luxurious strings in the third movement. The final fanfares are a touch on the manic side, but none the worse for that.

The *Capriccio* was prompted by the pianist Otakar Hollmann, who had lost his right arm in the First World War. Janáček's response was characteristically quirky, accompanying the solo part with brass ensemble, flute and piccolo. Both ensemble and soloist are excellent here. Jean-Efflam Bavouzet's playing captures the second movement's dramatic exchanges and is breathtakingly delicate in the filigree textures of the third. The *Cunning Little Vixen Suite* – fairly well known these days – is presented in Charles Mackerras's version of Talich's original arrangement, tidying up the orchestration and adding a more effective ending. Again, Gardner's tempos are brisk, but his strong sense of narrative and the beauty of the orchestral playing, in an admirably clear recording, produce a thoroughly satisfying performance. Altogether this is a most promising start to an excellent project.

*Jan Smaczny*

PERFORMANCE

(SINFONIETTA)

★★★★

(THE REST)

★★★★★

RECORDING

★★★★



## MAHLER

### Symphony No. 7

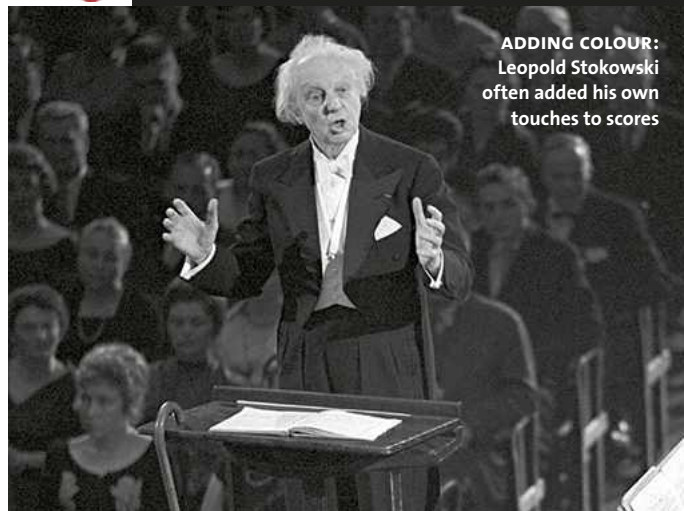
Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra of  
Venezuela/Gustavo Dudamel  
DG 479 1700 78:52 mins

BBC Music Direct

£14.99

Bright beacon among world-class orchestras, Venezuela's A-team came of age four years ago – having dropped the 'Youth' from its name – with Claudio Abbado in Prokofiev, Berg and Tchaikovsky at Lucerne (on DVD, reviewed January 2011). If he'd still been with them for this Mahler Seven, it would surely have been a purposeful first-class interpretation rather than this well-prepared performance with a terrific finale. Gustavo Dudamel pulls it off, but suffers in comparison with the very best on disc. His familiar tendency to bump in tempo changes robs the first movement of its gearing-up to a lurid night processional, though the final climax certainly blazes. The excellent and rather less good jostle alongside each other: the warm-hearted Venezuelan strings swell to their biggest moment in the central vision here, but there shouldn't be a breathmark, a





**ADDING COLOUR:**  
Leopold Stokowski  
often added his own  
touches to scores

## An American audio dream

Phase 4 Stereo was brash, bold and sometimes brilliant, says CD Review's **Andrew McGregor**



What exactly was 'Phase 4 Stereo', and how did we miss Phases 1-3? It turns out to have been more of a

marketing concept than anything else, coined by London Records, the Decca label's American offspring – often seen as brash by the parent company. In 1961 producer Tony D'Amato confirmed their prejudices by mixing multi-track recordings to hurl the listener into the heart of an exciting soundworld with startling presence and hyper-real stereo separation.

This box of reissues (Decca 478 6769; 41 CDs) focuses on the Stereo Concert Series, the label's 1964 entry into the classical environment, with controversial but often best-selling results. Skip over CD 1 of luridly spot-lit Sousa Marches, and head for Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. Clarinet solo hard-left, London Festival Orchestra brass centre-right, and Stanley Black's solo piano front-and-centre, up close and larger-than-life. Solo instruments are dragged forward in the mix, all with an immediacy, depth and colour that's enjoyable, even though you'd never hear it like this in the concert hall.

There are some real duds. I'd highlight a disc of Liszt and Rachmaninov Piano Concertos with average performances sonically manipulated into oblivion. But Phase 4 signed some fine conductors – Antal Doráti, Charles Munch, Leopold Stokowski – and at their best they flourish, Stokowski especially. He was already an inveterate orchestral tweeker to get the colours and balances he wanted, and *Sheherazade* and the *Symphonie fantastique* can take it, though I'm not so sure about

Beethoven's Symphony No. 9.

Doráti also fares well with a fine *Háry János* (Kodály),

glittering Respighi, and a thrilling *Carmina Burana* (Orff). Bernard Herrmann and Miklós Rózsa conducting their own film scores are exceptionally satisfying. The Boston Pops Encores disc with Arthur Fiedler is fun, although I have it on good authority that the Gershwin disc credited to Fiedler was actually conducted by his assistant, Harry Ellis Dickson, as Fiedler recuperated from a heart-attack. Presentation is first class. And there are pleasures in the performances as gripping as the recordings themselves.

**BBC Music Direct £99.99**

**This Gershwin has immediacy, depth and colour**

*luftpause*, call it what you will, before the darkness returns. An immediate lights-off is what's needed there. Dudamel also fails to make the central *valse triste* fly. The leader does heart-on-sleeve romanticism well in the transitional fourth-movement serenade, but the rest lack a true grace where it's required and they make the music's shadows too short.

No doubts about the finale, though: the pell-mell daylight rites sound like a Latin American carnival, the charges in the middle where the floats threaten to topple over as adrenalin-charged as Abbado's Lucerne Festival rollercoaster. The ending carries the joy that only a live performance can bring. That merits four stars and a permanent place on the CD shelves. *David Nice*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★



## MAHLER

### DVD Symphony No. 9

Gewandhaus Orchestra/Riccardo Chailly  
Accentus ACC 20299 85:59 + 29:13 mins

**BBC Music Direct £20.99**

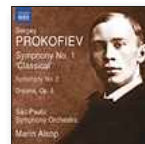
Riccardo Chailly would surely admit that Claudio Abbado's Lucerne Festival Mahler Ninth, also on Accentus DVD, is unsurpassable. Yet among the world's very greatest orchestras – and under Chailly, the Leipzig Gewandhaus is one of them – there are still different things to say about this richest of all symphonies. The keynote here is momentum, never forced except when it needs to feel that way (in the second of the *scherzo*'s country waltzes and the *Rondo-Burleske*). Right from the way Chailly flecks the short note of the cellos' opening arrhythmia, there's a superhuman level of detail and textures, much of which sounds new to me. I'll choose just one: the upper string's five-note turn at Mahler's 'highest power' moment in the first movement, never clearer or more emphatic, impressed on me anew how this paves the way for the most significant musical gesture in the middle of the *Rondo-Burleske* and the start of the colossal final *Adagio*.

All the woodwind deserve their bows, and I've never heard a more other-worldly first flute in a performance that otherwise generally shuns Abbado's sense of having crossed halfway to the other side

already. In interview with supreme Mahler biographer Henri-Louis de la Grange, whom he treats with such respect and affection, Chailly emphasises how full of life and forward thinking he finds the work, and that's totally borne out in an interpretation as impressive, in terms of articulation and colour, as any in an ever-growing catalogue of greats.

*David Nice*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**PICTURE & SOUND** ★★★★★  
**EXTRAS** ★★★★★



## PROKOFIEV

### Symphonies Nos 1 & 2; Dreams, Op. 6

São Paulo Symphony Orchestra/  
Marin Alsop  
Naxos 8.573353 56:55 mins

**BBC Music Direct £7.99**

Has Naxos somewhat missed the point in cover-billing the First Symphony over the Second on the latest instalment of Marin Alsop's Prokofiev series? After all, when did a *Classical* Symphony, less than a quarter of an hour long, show off a full orchestra to its best advantage? No, the Second, that steel monster designed to shock the Parisians in the mid 1920s, is the thing here. Alsop and her Brazilian orchestra turn in a clear-textured performance – no mean feat under the circumstances – but one devoid of the essential angry drive that keeps you on the edge of your seat throughout the first movement. Nor are all the atmospheres of the next movement's theme and variations – subjecting a lovely 'white-note' melody to all sorts of harmonic and rhythmic vicissitudes – especially evocative, though the playing is good enough to make you marvel at some of the fairground antics.

The programming is clever, though, separating the neo-classicism of 1917 from the mechanics of 1925 with an impressionist gem which stands as one of Prokofiev's earliest orchestral scores: *Dreams*, Op. 6. Again, I don't doubt that Alsop is, as her biography states, 'an inspiring and powerful voice on the international music scene', but I do miss temperament and mood in her conducting, and *Dreams* is the work here most in need of special coloration. Perhaps the dry recording doesn't help. I can't visualise the players smiling through the *Classical*, either, but it's efficient enough,

with one touch of individuality in the leaning on the upbeats of the Gavotte. *David Nice*

PERFORMANCE

★★★

RECORDING

★★★



## SCHUBERT

**Symphonies Nos 1 & 2;  
Adrast – Funeral March;  
Rosamunde Overture**

Swedish Chamber Orchestra/  
Thomas Dausgaard  
BIS-1989 (hybrid CD/SACD)  
76:39 mins

BBC Music Direct £13.99

Thomas Dausgaard and his Swedish Chamber Orchestra complete their Schubert cycle with the composer's two earliest symphonies (previous volumes reviewed June 2010, Christmas 2013, May 2014). Once again, it's an exhilarating release, in excellent sound. Some might have dismissed these symphonies as imitations of the teenage Schubert's Classical heroes, but in Dausgaard's hands they emerge as elegant, lively scores already bearing the stamp of the composer's sophisticated harmonic and melodic imagination.

Once again, Dausgaard and his musicians supply long-breathed, fluid phrasing allied to a buoyant and unflagging sense of momentum. The Symphony No. 1 especially benefits. It starts with a slow introduction that sounds like a Mozartian procession; here it has a bit of a swagger, and the bubbling *Allegro* seems impatient to get going. The *Menuetto* swings like a giant pendulum. The balance is finely judged; when the trumpets enter they add an injection of energy but they don't dominate.

Once again, though, the flipside of this approach is that Dausgaard's insistence on rhythmic drive can eclipse all else, especially in the long first movement of the Symphony No. 2, which is almost exhausting to listen to. A touch of harshness creeps in here, too, but the orchestra gets its poise back for the opening of the slow movement, which is beautifully done.

Alongside the symphonies are an elegant performance of the overture Schubert wrote for the play *Die Zauberharfe* but which listeners may know from its later use (possibly without the composer's consent) in *Rosamunde*, and a solemn but flowing funeral march from the abandoned opera *Adrast. Erica Jeal*

PERFORMANCE

★★★★

RECORDING

★★★★★

## REISSUES

*Reviewed by Malcolm Hayes*

### RUBBRA

**Symphonies Nos 5 & 6**

Hallé Orchestra/Sir John Barbirolli  
Barbirolli Society SJB 1081 (1950, 1956)  
67:55 mins

BBC Music Direct £12.99



Rubbra fans will welcome the appearance of this previously unreleased world

premiere performance of the Sixth Symphony. Fine, warm-toned playing graces the Fifth as well.

PERFORMANCE

★★★★

RECORDING (NO. 6)

★★

(OTHERS)

★★★★

### MAHLER • BARBIROLI\*

**Symphony No. 1; An Elizabethan Suite\***

Czech Phil/Sir John Barbirolli  
Barbirolli Society SJB 1082 (1960)  
67:52 mins

BBC Music Direct £12.99



Mahler's First Symphony was always a Barbirolli party piece, and the superlative Czech Philharmonic play out of their skins for him in Prague's acoustically gorgeous Smetana Hall.

PERFORMANCE

★★★★★

RECORDING

★★★

### BRAHMS • WEBER\*

**Symphony No. 1 • Oberon Overture\***

Hallé Orchestra/Sir John Barbirolli  
Barbirolli Society SJB 1083 (1958)  
53:59 mins

BBC Music Direct £12.99



Listen blind, and you'd think this is the Vienna Phil: Barbirolli's Hallé is on fire in these

near-fabulous performances in the Smetana Hall, with wonderful horn and flute solos.

PERFORMANCE

★★★★★

RECORDING

★★

### BRIAN • FOULDS\*

**Symphonic movements from The Tigers**

• *Pasquinade Symphonique No. 1\**  
Luxembourg Radio Symphony/Hager  
Heritage HTGCD 270 (1981) 67:13 mins  
BBC Music Direct £10.99



These extracts from Brian's comic-satirical opera offer subtle invention besides his compulsive prolixity, and appeal much more strongly than Foulds's fluent but characterless *Pasquinade*. Clear, classy performances.

PERFORMANCE

★★★★

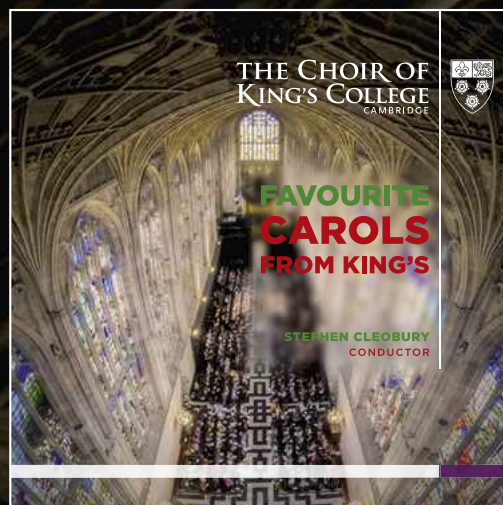
RECORDING

★★★★

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# CONCERTO

Two albums from Russian pianist *Oleg Marshev* demonstrate his refinement in Chopin and zest in Mendelssohn; plus *Julian Bliss* deftly characterises Mozart's and Nielsen's Clarinet Concertos

## BBC MUSIC CONCERTO CHOICE

### Fragrant, fearless Szymanowski

*Martin Cotton* enjoys Baiba Skride's blend of edge and sensuality



**IMAGINATIVE SOUNDS:**  
Baiba Skride plays  
with idiomatic flair



#### SYZMANOWSKI

##### Violin Concertos Nos 1 & 2; Mythes

Baiba Skride (violin), Lauma Skride (piano); Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra/  
Vasily Petrenko  
Orfeo C 873141A 65:36 mins  
BBC Music Direct £14.99

The First Concerto's opening here is vigorous and cleanly etched, with detailed recording, almost wrong-footing you into expecting a speedy, gritty first movement. But the impeccably judged slowing into the first violin entry leads ineluctably to the sensuous world of Szymanowski's imagination.

This music is often described as heady and perfumed, and there's no shortage of those qualities in Baiba Skride's performance, which is full of tonal variety, and fearless in the often vertiginous tessitura. She and Vasily Petrenko don't short-change the more dynamic sections though,

#### Baiba Skride's playing is fearless in the often vertiginous tessitura

and the way that they keep the two sides of the music in balance is riveting and beguiling.

There's greater folk influence in Concerto No. 2, although it's completely absorbed into Szymanowski's musical language. The result is a more grounded work, with less chromatic harmony and

often a stronger rhythmic profile: a sense of the dance is not far away. Skride inhabits this different world with equal ease, and as assured a sense of direction.

*Mythes* come from the same impressionist world as the First Concerto, but with greater intimacy in the scoring for violin and piano. Without orchestral colour, there's nowhere for Skride to hide: not that she needs to. Harmonics, arpeggios, double-stops and trills are all played with ease and real feeling, and the partnership with her sister is a joy.

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★



#### ON THE WEBSITE

Hear extracts from this recording and the rest of this month's choices on the **BBC Music Magazine website**  
[www.classical-music.com](http://www.classical-music.com)



#### CHOPIN

##### Piano Concertos Nos 1 & 2; Fantasy on Polish Airs; Krakowiak, Concerto-Rondo in F; Variations on 'Là ci darem la mano'; Andante spianato et Grande Polonaise brillante

Oleg Marshev (piano); South Denmark Philharmonic/David Porcelijn  
Danacord DACOCD 701-702  
136:06 mins (2 discs)

**BBC Music Direct** £24.99

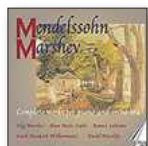
At his best Oleg Marshev is a superlative pianist, and if he has produced rather uneven results in the recording studio, his finest work – including an outstanding survey of Prokofiev's Sonatas – displays a glorious marriage of technique and temperament. Chopin's works for piano and orchestra, early showcases for the composer's own piano playing, make very specific demands on the soloist: lyricism, Gallic elegance and graceful athleticism rather than a more muscular virtuosity.

Thankfully, Marshev is superbly attuned to this music, especially in the two concertos. He brings an inner life and expressiveness to the long lines of passagework, and his playing exudes a generosity of spirit. There are many loving details in the slow movements (although the 'recitative'-like section of the F minor Concerto really needs more drama), and some beautifully judged rhythmic pointing in the finales. Marshev doesn't bring the imagination and sheer force of personality one gets elsewhere (most obviously from Martha Argerich), but these are fine performances. The orchestral support is solid if rather stodgy, although there are some excellent woodwind contributions.

The remaining works occasionally sound a little less secure, both technically and interpretatively. Marshev negotiates the difficulties in the *Là ci darem la mano* Variations and the *Grande polonaise brillante* with aplomb, but the less-often played *Fantasy on Polish airs* and *Krakowiak*



are less convincing, owing partly to the rather shapeless orchestral playing. The sound is decent, and Jeremy Nicholas's notes are characteristically engaging. *Tim Parry*  
**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★



## MENDELSSOHN

**Piano Concertos Nos 1-3; Piano Concerto in A minor; Serenade and Allegro giocoso; Rondo brilliant in E flat; Capriccio brilliant in B minor; Concertos for two pianos in A flat and E; Violin and Piano Concerto in D minor**

Oleg Marshev, Anne Mette Stoehr (piano), Rumen Lukanov (violin); South Denmark Philharmonic/David Porcelijn  
 Danacord DACOD 734-736  
 244:57 mins (4 discs)

**BBC Music Direct** £39.99

There's a lot to love in this meaty set of Mendelssohn's complete works for piano and orchestra. First of all, Oleg Marshev, sympathetically backed by David Porcelijn and his responsive orchestra, responds to Mendelssohn's two official piano concertos not as precious, handle-with-care pieces, but rather as full-blooded Romantic war-horses, complete with tempests, traumas and tearaway virtuosity; the result is startling, fresh and rather thrilling. The shorter works keeping them company on the first CD are likewise rewarding listens.

The remaining discs are devoted to lesser-known works: CD two offers an early Concerto in A minor with plenty of charm, even if its contours are less striking than its big siblings; and the Concerto No. 3 here appears in its completion by Marcello Bufalini. This work was left in sketches only, with especially little to point the way to the finale. Bufalini's version has a beautiful chamber-music colouration, though the last movement feels slightly disjointed. Marshev delivers the solo part with much expressive flair; his passagework sensitively blends into the total texture, and the second movement is brought enchantingly to life, especially in the pianist's exchanges with the two oboes.

Special hat-tip to the South Denmark Philharmonic's wind players, who are on sterling form throughout the set.

Things take off more strongly still in the two concertos for two pianos on disc three. Here sparks really fly; Marshev and Anne Mette Staehr sound as if they are having enormous

fun leaping over Mendelssohn's plentiful hurdles. Their vitality and wit is irresistible in these possibly second-tier yet thoroughly enjoyable pieces.

The 'bonus' CD offers the Concerto for Violin and Piano, and very worthwhile it is. It demands fiercely accurate coordination between the soloists, and Marshev and Lukanov rise splendidly to its challenges. *Jessica Duchen*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★



## CHOPIN

**Piano Concerto No. 1 (orch. Balakirev)**

## MENDELSSOHN

**Die Heimkehr aus der Fremde Overture; Piano Concerto in E minor (completed by Martin Yates)**

Victor Sangiorgio (piano); Royal Northern Sinfonia/Martin Yates  
 Dutton Epoch CDLX 7312 75:00 mins

**BBC Music Direct** £13.99

Decidedly an out-of-the-ordinary recording, this CD brings together some intriguing Mendelssohn rarities with Balakirev's reimagining of the Chopin Piano Concerto No. 1. First comes the overture to an opera that the youthful (late teens) Mendelssohn wrote to celebrate his parents' silver wedding anniversary; he did not permit it to be staged again, due to its intimate salon nature. The loss was ours; this sample is utterly enchanting, and the Royal Northern Sinfonia under Martin Yates responds with atmospheric and affectionate playing.

Yates – like R Larry Todd and Marcello Bufalini in their own versions – should be congratulated for putting supreme effort into the completion of the E minor Piano Concerto, which the composer began in 1842 but abandoned, leaving only a few sketches. The result is full of Mendelssohn's distinctive voice, sensitively orchestrated, but the material itself remains frustratingly short of memorable ideas.

Balakirev's arrangement of Chopin's E minor Concerto makes clear his admiration of this work, though his reworking of its orchestration, with motivic material fleshed out, plus extra colour, for instance a cor anglais, does little to improve on Chopin's discreet original. Still, it makes an intriguing alternative, much of its own time. The performance, though, is

somewhat patchy, with Sangiorgio's passagework occasionally sounding laboured and the finale's energy periodically flagging. *Jessica Duchen*  
**PERFORMANCE** ★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★



## MOZART

**Non che non sei capace, K419; Der Liebe himmlisches Gefühl, K119; Clarinet Concerto in A**

## NIELSEN

**Clarinet Concerto**

Julian Bliss (clarinet); Royal Northern Sinfonia/Mario Venzago

Signum SIGCD 390 63:32 mins

**BBC Music Direct** £12.99

Nielsen's 1928 Clarinet Concerto was conceived as a portrait of its intended soloist Aage Oxenvad: in it, as Robert Simpson wrote, 'choleric humour, pathos and kindness are mingled in conflict'. The young British clarinetist Julian Bliss responds to the work's mercurial switches of mood with a wide range of colour and articulation, and meets its considerable technical challenges with seemingly offhand virtuosity. He is well matched by the seasoned Mario Venzago and the players of the Royal Northern Sinfonia, with outstanding contributions from the wind section of bassoons and horns and the naggingly ever-present side drum. Bliss wins points over his obvious rival Martin Fröst (on BIS), for the sense of teamwork gained through this use of a chamber orchestra, captured in a vivid if startlingly close-up recording. But in the heat of the moment he gets a beat out for a couple of bars at 07:15 in the first movement, which should have been corrected.

Bliss's gift for characterisation is evident also in his adaptations of two Mozart concert arias, 'Non che non sei capace' and 'Der Liebe himmlisches Gefühl', which he plays with imaginative ornamentation. But the other main work is Mozart's evergreen Concerto, a late work like the Nielsen. Although the booklet doesn't anywhere mention the fact, this is played on a basset clarinet, with the extra low notes presumed to be in Mozart's lost manuscript. Bliss integrates the bottom register smoothly, in a performance matching that of the Nielsen in flair, intimacy and spontaneity. *Anthony Burton*  
**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★

## REISSUES

Reviewed by *Michael Church*

## BEETHOVEN

**Piano Concertos Nos 1-5; Meeresstille und glückliche Fahrt; Choral Fantasia**  
 Yefim Bronfman (piano); Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra/David Zinman  
 Brilliant Classics 94856 (2005-07)  
 197:46 mins

**BBC Music Direct** £12.99 (3 discs)



Bronfman's muscular yet subtle style matches the heroic requirements of these works, but what's

piquant is the addition of the *Choral Fantasia* and the (purely choral) *Meeresstille und glückliche Fahrt*.

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★

## DVOŘÁK

**Complete concertos**

Ricci (violin), Nelsova (cello), Firkušný (piano); Saint Louis SO/Susskind  
 Brilliant Classics 94938 (1975) 129:50 mins

**BBC Music Direct** £10.99 (2 discs)



The Violin and Cello Concertos, superbly played, have long been audience favourites, but the

rarely-heard Piano Concerto in G minor – eloquently played by its foremost champion – is the USP.

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★

## SAINT-SAËNS

**Piano Concertos Nos 1-5; Africa, Op. 89**  
 Gabriel Tacchino (piano), Orchestra of Radio Luxembourg/Louis de Froment  
 Brilliant Classics 94944 (1974-78)  
 144:53 mins (2 discs)

**BBC Music Direct** £10.99



Tacchino, a leading interpreter of late-Romantic French music, makes an unanswerable case for

these underrated works to be taken more seriously, especially the First.

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★

## BEETHOVEN

**Violin Concerto; Piano Concerto No. 4\***  
 Kogan (violin); Orchestre des Concerts du Conservatoire/Silvestri; Richter-Haaser (piano)\*; Philharmonia/Kertész\*  
 Amare Classics 1002 77:25 mins

**BBC Music Direct** £10.99



Overshadowed by Oistrakh, Kogan was no less great a musician; his account of Beethoven's

*Larghetto* has a heart-stopping beauty, while Richter-Haaser's pianism is marvellously polished.

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★



# OPERA

*Barbara Hannigan* proves herself today's greatest singer of Berg's *Lulu*, while *Vesselina Kasarova* captures both the allure and the dignity of *Carmen*; plus *Cecilia Bartoli* explores the roots of Imperial Russian opera

## BBC MUSIC OPERA CHOICE

### Singing the light fantastic

*George Hall* enjoys Jonas Kaufmann's look at the golden age of operetta

'MATINEE IDOL':  
Jonas Kaufmann  
sings popular hits



#### YOU MEAN THE WORLD TO ME

Operetta arias by Lehár, Tauber, Stolz, Kalman, Heymann, May, Spoliansky, Künneke and Korngold

Jonas Kaufmann (tenor), Julia Kleiter (soprano); Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra/Jochen Rieder

Sony 88843087712 65:41 mins

**BBC Music Direct £14.99**

It's been a while since a major tenor recorded operetta repertoire, and Jonas Kaufmann does not disappoint. His choices focus on

the period 1925-35, and take in songs written for films starring such notables as Joseph Schmidt, as well as arias from Lehár's operettas made popular by Richard Tauber. Kaufmann offers a more intimate, less full-throated approach than

#### Light music sounds at its best when treated with seriousness

them, but it's highly effective and both his musicianship and his attention to text are characteristically impeccable. Also noteworthy are the orchestrations, which – wherever possible – are the originals, and elsewhere stylish copies: light music sounds at its best when treated with

the seriousness it is so often denied and here the period feel is palpable.

The repertoire covers some of the great hits of the time, as well as the odd excursion into opera, such as the luscious 'Glück, das mir verblieb' from Korngold's *Die tote Stadt*. Soprano Julia Kleiter joins Kaufmann here and in a couple of other numbers, lighter of tone and arguably less convincing than he; but throughout Kaufmann devotees will find him the perfect matinee idol.

**PERFORMANCE ★★★★★**  
**RECORDING ★★★★★**



#### ON THE WEBSITE

Hear extracts from this recording and the rest of this month's choices on the **BBC Music Magazine website**  
[www.classical-music.com](http://www.classical-music.com)



#### BERG

##### DVD Lulu

Barbara Hannigan, Dietrich Henschel, Charles Workman, Natascha Petrinsky; Orchestre symphonique de la Monnaie/ Paul Daniel; dir. Krzysztof Warlikowski (Brussels, 2012)

Bel Air Classiques BAC 109 194 mins (2 discs)

**BBC Music Direct £30.99**

It's a comparatively rare occurrence to encounter a performance on the opera stage that has such a magnetic visual and physical impact as Barbara Hannigan's portrayal of Berg's tragic heroine. So complete is her identification with the central character that from the moment she enters the stage, you are transfixed. Her absolute vocal mastery is marvellous, not to mention her naturalness of facial expressions and sensuality of body movement which, in Krzysztof Warlikowski's thought-provoking direction, requires her to spend much time in the first half of the opera tottering around on ballet point shoes.

Many of the supporting protagonists in this torrid drama are no less compelling. Dietrich Henschel, emulating the lyrical baritone of Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, portrays Dr Schön as weak-willed and wracked with despair. Even in the Third Act where he returns as Jack the Ripper, it is Lulu rather than he who has the courage to seize the knife and plunge it into her body. In contrast, Natascha Petrinsky as Countess Geschwitz is tender, passionate and decisive, her final soliloquy mourning Lulu's death a shattering emotional experience. The Orchestre symphonique de la Monnaie, under the purposeful direction of Paul Daniel, steers a clear course through the complexities of Berg's score, though some of the lyricism and beauty of timbre that the Vienna Philharmonic brings to the music is missing.

The production is likely to irritate some: it includes projected video images as well as extraneous elements such as a recitation in English of the myth of Lilith before the opera begins and a five-minute silent dance of the Black Swan at the end of the First Act. And I'm not entirely convinced that the camera copes that effectively with negotiating all the activity on stage. Nevertheless,



the performance simply has to be experienced as a testament to Hannigan's formidable strengths as a supreme interpreter of Berg's masterpiece. *Erik Levi*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
PICTURE & SOUND ★★



## BIZET

### DVD Carmen

Vesselina Kasarova, Jonas Kaufmann, Isabel Rey, Michele Pertusi, Morgan Moody, Kresimir Strazanac, Sen Guo, Judith Schmid, Gabriel Bermudez, Javier Camarena; Zurich Opera Chorus, Youth Chorus, Children's Chorus and Supplementary Chorus; Zurich Opera Orchestra/Franz Welser-Möst; dir. Matthias Hartmann (Zurich, 2008)  
Decca 074 3881 166 mins

BBC Music Direct £15.99

That sleeping dog on the front of the stage which mechanically raises its ear when petted wasn't a good idea. But everywhere else this is as fine a *Carmen* as you'll find on DVD. In Matthias Hartmann's vivid production, it is played out on a plain white raised circle, making the opera an extended version of the drama of the bullfight. This is a *Carmen* that unapologetically belongs to 'now' with the soldiers as policeman who strip Michaela when she comes looking for Don José and the gypsy smugglers social outcasts living on their wits led by a pair of macho thugs.

Tenor Jonas Kaufmann is an immaculate Don José, living each turn of the drama vocally and with the desperation of his desire for Carmen etched into every note of their final murderous encounter. For once Escamillo is more than a hunk with the best-known tune in the opera as bass-baritone Michele Pertusi finds dignity and even a sense of humour in the matador.

However, it's mezzo-soprano Vesselina Kasarova's Carmen who makes this production unforgettable. Not just her smoky mezzo dipping down into the chest register in the Habanera, but her gifts as an actress. She makes Carmen a woman who's been round the block several times and is all the more desirable for that. Laser-like she spots Escamillo the moment he enters the bar, while her self-possession when the cards foretell her death and her grace when that moment arrives reveal a remarkable attention to emotional detail.

All praise, too, for conductor Franz Welser-Möst and the Zurich Opera House Orchestra. Their playing is crisp and clean with tempos that resist any temptation to linger and so sentimentalise the score. *Christopher Cook*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
PICTURE & SOUND ★★★★★



## BOITO

### DVD Mefistofele

Ildar Abdrazakov, Ramón Vargas, Patricia Racette, Erin Johnson, Chuanyue Wang; San Francisco Opera Orchestra & Chorus/Nicola Luisotti; dir. Robert Carsen (San Francisco, 2013)  
San Francisco Opera DVD: 2059678;  
Blu-ray: 2059674 145 mins

BBC Music Direct £34.99

Arrigo Boito's remarkable opera is one of the few Italian works of its period (1868, revised 1875-6), other than those by the giant Verdi, to keep a place in the repertoire – although its composer is better known as Verdi's librettist than for his music in its own right. This DVD of Robert Carsen's 2013 San Francisco production shows just how unfair such a judgement is. Substantial in size and scope, *Mefistofele* comes over here as an idiosyncratic masterpiece of the genre.

Robert Carsen, who first staged the work in Geneva some quarter of a century ago, returns to it here in a staging that emphasises the theatricality – undoubtedly influenced by the French grand operas of Meyerbeer and his ilk – that informs page after page of Boito's writing; thus we are essentially in a theatre, where (for instance) the chorus look as if they've raided a gigantic costume box for the Kermesse scene. Other visuals come over with more distinction: even the impossible-to-stage Prologue in Heaven has some rarely achieved splendour.

Carsen's cast is fine, centred on the outsize star performance of Ildar Abdrazakov in the title role. He brings sex appeal to Satan, his authentic Russian bass sounding marvellous in the blatant vulgarity of this grandiose assumption. Ramón Vargas brings a combination of intelligence and moral weight to bear on Faust, singing the role with lyrical warmth plus discretion. Patricia Racette makes a demurely virginal



EMOTIONAL TRUTH:  
Vesselina Kasarova is  
superb as Bizet's heroine

if ultimately deluded Margherita, before switching to a grandly impassioned Elena (Helen of Troy) in the Walpurgis Night scene. Among secondary roles, Erin Johnson stands out as the mature good-time-girl Marta.

San Francisco's chorus and orchestra seize their opportunities, and conductor Nicola Luisotti revels in the grander possibilities of the score, as well as shining a torch on its finer detail and conscientious craftsmanship. *George Hall*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
PICTURE & SOUND ★★★★★



## CALDARA

### La concordia de' pianeti

Delphine Galou, Veronica Cangemi, Ruxandra Donose, Franco Fagioli, Carlos Mena, Daniel Behle, Luca Tittoto; Vokalensemble Basel; La Cetra Barockorchester/Andrea Marcon  
Archiv Produktion 479 3356  
108:07 mins (2 discs)

BBC Music Direct £22.99

Antonio Caldara was one of the Baroque era's most celebrated and prolific composers, but dropped into obscurity after his death. This recording was made at an adventurous three-day Caldara festival in Dortmund, where *La concordia de' pianeti* received its modern debut. Originally performed outdoors in 1723, Caldara's serenata was written to celebrate Habsburg Empress Elisabeth; its characters –

Apollo, Diana and various planets – debate which of her virtues is the greatest. Caldara's lush scoring and virtuosic writing make this music thrilling, his ritornellos in particular being artful in their balance of instrumental colours and textures against the vocalists' lines. But because the serenata is celebratory in nature and conceived for the open air, its affective and dynamic range is limited.

The bravura of this performance cuts Caldara's serenata loose from these constraints. Andrea Marcon conducts with crisp authority, giving high definition to the composer's motifs and rhythms. As Diana, Veronica Cangemi delivers eye-popping variations on her da capo aria's first section. The Jove summoned up by alto Ruxandra Donose combines muscle and emotional depth in an epic, six-minute aria.

The instrumentalists are even more impressive: crazy keyboard realisations, strutting clarino passages and flouncy oboe entries vie with the vocal lines for attention, supplying some of the drama which the libretto lacks. Unfortunately, the flashiest obbligato aria falls to countertenor Carlos Mena, whose vibrato and uneven intonation cast a pall over 'Da mia tromba', in which voice is pitted against trumpet.

Overall, though, this is a glorious recording, showing how Caldara's music can unleash the imagination of its performers. It makes a strong case for reviving more of his compositions. *Berta Joncus*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★



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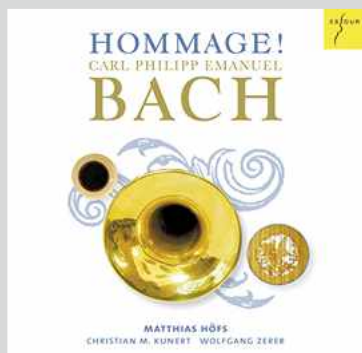


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## HARTMANN

### Simplicius Simplicissimus

Juliane Banse, Peter Marsch, Will Hartmann, Ashley Holland, Kristof Klorek, Michael Elder, Harry Peters; Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Choir & Orchestra/Markus Stenz  
Challenge CC 72637 (hybrid CD/SACD)  
85:01 mins (2 discs)

**BBC Music Direct £28.99**

One of the most significant German operas of the 20th century, Karl Amadeus Hartmann's *Simplicius Simplicissimus* still awaits a British performance, but has done relatively well on disc. Recorded in the Saturday matinee series at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam a couple of seasons ago, this performance brings the work to vivid life as it tells a story – based on Grimmelshausen's novel – drawn from the Thirty Years War.

Composed in the 1930s as a protest against the Nazis by a composer who went into 'inner exile', the opera was not staged until 1949. But the version heard here is Hartmann's second version from the 1950s, in which he pruned some of the Brechtian agitprop aspects without diluting its impact as a musical and ideological manifesto. From Jewish song to Bach chorale, the quotes are as integral as the allusions to such composers as Stravinsky and

Prokofiev. The impact is similar to that of Hindemith's operas.

Leading a strong cast, Juliane Banse as the shepherd brilliantly meets the soprano part's technical challenges while evoking the naivety of the idealistic character. Ashley Holland, as the mercenary, Landsknecht, uses his baritone to impressive effect, and the tenor Will Hartmann captures the visionary spirit of the hermit Einsiedel. Conducting the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic forces, Markus Stenz proves himself an ideal exponent of this music, drawing a performance of conviction and intensity. *John Allison*

**PERFORMANCE ★★★★★**  
**RECORDING ★★★★★**



## HASSE

### Marc' Antonio e Cleopatra

Vivica Genaux, Francesca Lombardi Mazzulli; La Musiche Nove/Claudio Osele  
Deutsche Harmonia Mundi 88883721872  
91 mins (2 discs)

**BBC Music Direct £18.99**

Great voices inspired Johann Hasse. New to Naples in the early 1720s, the young Hasse soon met the young Farinelli, destined to be the era's most celebrated opera singer. The serenata *Marc' Antonio e Cleopatra* grew from his collaboration with Farinelli, cast to sing opposite the renowned prima donna Vittoria Tesi. Both singers shared precocious virtuosity and an intensity that made their stage characters credible.

In Farinelli's role of Cleopatra, soprano Francesca Mazzulli shows why she's a rising star today. Even in the toughest passages she bounds elegantly through leaps and runs. Her recitative arioso, in which Cleopatra emerges as the drama's chief agent, is riveting. Marc' Antonio, defeated by his erstwhile fellow Triumvir Octavian, returns to his lover Cleopatra, whose empire he's been defending. After celebrating their reunion, she induces him to commit suicide with her, since 'death alone honour and union guarantee'. Mazzulli's incandescent arioso makes agreement a foregone conclusion.

As Marc' Antonio, Vivica Genaux is equally convincing, though her music is much less spectacular. She infuses Antonio's lyricism with an almost tangible desperation, while adapting her powerful voice to the pallid restraint of the defeated hero. Claudio Osele's conducting guides and enhances the performances of

Mazzulli and Genaux, shifting, often unexpectedly and always elegantly, between fire and tenderness. Hasse's scoring makes the accompanying instruments sing even in the densest textures, and the players of Le Musiche Nove bring out this distinctive feature of the composer's writing. Original, sensitive and superbly engineered, this performance surpasses the rival 2010 recording on Ars Lyrica. *Berta Joncus*

**PERFORMANCE ★★★★★**  
**RECORDING ★★★★★**



## MACMILLAN

### Clemency

David Kravitz, Michelle Trainor, Christine Abraham; Boston Lyric Opera Orchestra/David Angus  
BIS BIS-2129 58:55 mins

**BBC Music Direct £13.99**

This disc chronicles the US premiere of James MacMillan's chamber opera *Clemency*, and as such includes as a prologue *Hagar's Lament*, probably the first song ever completed by the teenage Schubert. Boston Lyric Opera used it in their 2013 staging of *Clemency*, from which this live recording was taken. Sung in slightly squally fashion by soprano Michelle Trainor, it makes an odd curtain-raiser to the opera proper, although one sees the link thematically – Hagar was mistress to the Old Testament Abraham, who with his wife Sarah is a central protagonist in *Clemency's* libretto.

Abraham is the firm, authoritative baritone David Kravitz, who grows in vocal stature as the action progresses, and rises sonorously to the challenge of his final scene, where he repeatedly challenges the three 'Travellers' on a mysterious mission to exact punishment on two nearby towns.

MacMillan's writing for his three armed men – two tenors and a baritone – is among the most potent in the opera, and there are particularly intense, numinous passages where all five voices sound simultaneously, in interweaving incantation. Christine Abraham's Sarah is strongly committed, though there's a certain straining for the high notes and an unwonted feeling of feverishness amid the string polyphony of the opera's conclusion.

*Clemency* is scored for strings only, and conductor David Angus ekes plenty of trenchant detail from his Boston players. There's some scrappiness both vocally and

instrumentally, but it's worth it for the extra charge you get from live performance conditions. *Terry Blain*  
**PERFORMANCE ★★★★★**  
**RECORDING ★★★★★**



## MOZART

### DVD Don Giovanni

Mariusz Kwiecień, Alex Esposito, Malin Byström, Véronique Gens, Elizabeth Watts, Antonio Poli, Dawid Kimberg, Alexander Tsymbalyuk; ROH/Nicola Luisotti, dir. Kasper Holten (London, 2014)  
Opus Arte DVD: OA 1145D;  
Blu-ray: OABD 7152D 187 mins (2 discs)

**BBC Music Direct (DVD) £28.99**

**BBC Music Direct (Blu-ray) £34.99**

This 'psychological' interpretation received mixed reviews when premiered in February 2014, which may be why the 'extras' on this DVD last almost as long as the opera. The director, Kasper Holten, and set designer, Es Devlin, spend two and a half hours taking us through every scene justifying what is going on. For them, the women are complicit in, rather than victims of, the Don's seductions – not that this explains why (for example) they cause Donna Anna to invite him deliberately into her bedroom, then watch him murder her father, then lovingly invite him back in again. Also, although there is a psychological logic to smothering the set with the names from Leporello's catalogue – as though jumbled in the Don's mind – it is visually tiring, and some of the symbolic details (such as the tiny fragmentary quotations from Dante on Elvira's dress) are so obscure as to be practically confidential.

The relatively sombre set (more vivid on Blu-ray) contains many doors out of which the characters emerge to confront each other. Unfortunately Mozart's score does not support the meeting of characters placed on the stage by the director rather than the librettist, and the music often seems relegated to a mere backdrop – if it does not fit the director's vision it is cut (as happens to a chunk of the finale) or downplayed. The performers are good rather than great singers of Mozart. Mariusz Kwiecień (the Don) and Alex Esposito (Leporello) are clear-voiced and well matched, Alexander Tsymbalyuk is a stentorian Commendatore, Véronique Gens an uneven Elvira (her vibrato just about in focus in this carefully poised music), and while Malin

## BACKGROUND TO...



### Johann Adolf Hasse (1699-1783)

The German composer was born in Berge-dorf, near

Hamburg. He began his career as an operatic tenor, noted both for the beauty of his voice and for his acting ability. Hasse left Germany after the success of his first opera, *Antiocho*, and spent several years in Italy: *Marc' Antonio e Cleopatra* was composed for one of his Italian patrons. From the mid-1720s until the late 1760s, Hasse was widely acclaimed as an opera composer both in Italy and in German-speaking lands. Though prolific, his understanding of the capability of individual singers made him well respected.



Byström (Anna), Elizabeth Watts (Zerlina), Antonio Poli (Ottavio) and Dawid Kimberg (Masetto) act well they are sometimes less impressive if listened to with a score. *Anthony Pryer*  
**PERFORMANCE** ★★★  
**PICTURE & SOUND** ★★★★★  
**EXTRAS** ★★★★★



## MOZART

### Mitridate, re di Ponto

Barry Banks, Miah Persson, Sophie Bevan, Lawrence Zazzo, Klara Ek, Robert Murray, Anna Devin; Orchestra of Classical Opera/Ian Page  
 Signum SIGCD400 224:18 mins (4 discs)  
**BBC Music Direct £22.99**

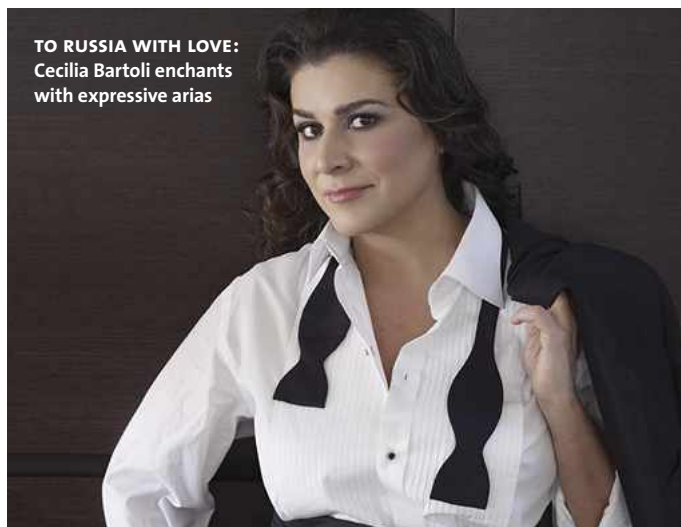
The latest set of the 14-year-old Mozart's first *opera seria* takes the available tally to seven (not to mention five DVD *Mitridates*) – an astonishing reversal of fortune for a work unknown not so long ago, and dismissed in history books as precocious but immature. This new one, though complete and fastidiously presented, with a valuable appendix CD of original-version arias rejected by their original performers, cannot be said to sweep the board; but it does possess one outstanding feature.

Barry Banks delivers a dazzlingly authoritative account of the title role, a capricious autocrat brilliantly characterised by continual volleys above the stave. A front-rank lighter-weight Rossini tenor, he may not possess the bronzed tones of Bruce Ford (whose celebrated *Mitridate* can be admired in two different Covent Garden DVDs and a Salzburg CD set); but from the start he throws off notes and words with such fearless hauteur that all comparisons soon cease.

At the point of the king's entrance, late in Act I, the performance begins to take on heat; earlier it seems somewhat tamely conducted, not helped by the recorded sound's lack in immediacy. There's impressive singing from sopranos Miah Persson and Sophie Bevan in leading roles and Klara Ek and Anna Devin in supporting ones, plus a fruity countertenor villain from Lawrence Zazzo. But for a far livelier overall impression, *Mitridate* newcomers should try Christophe Rousset's Decca set, which features matchless contributions from soprano Natalie Dessay and mezzo-soprano Cecilia Bartoli. *Max Loppert*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★

**TO RUSSIA WITH LOVE:**  
 Cecilia Bartoli enchants  
 with expressive arias



## OFFENBACH

### Fantasio

Sarah Connolly, Brenda Rae, Brindley Sherratt, Russell Braun, Robert Murray, Neal Davies, Victoria Simmonds, Aled Hall, Gavan Ring, Michael Burke, Robert Anthony Gardiner, Nicholas Jenkins; Opera Rara Chorus; Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment/Mark Elder  
 Opera Rara ORC51 139:08 mins (2 discs)  
**BBC Music Direct £28.99**

*Fantasio* began unpromisingly with a libretto carved out of a not altogether successful play by Alfred de Musset. Then came the Franco-Prussian war; and Offenbach, the toast of Second Empire Paris, became a German composer from the other side of the Rhine. *Fantasio* was dropped by the Opéra-Comique in 1872 after just ten performances. However, Offenbach, practical as ever, borrowed a students' chorus from it for *The Tales of Hoffmann*.

If anyone might have convinced us that *Fantasio* is indeed a masterpiece and not just a hidden gem, then it would have been Sir Mark Elder and the magnificent cast led by Sarah Connolly. She plays a student prankster who pretends to be the King's dead jester and wins the hand of his daughter, having prevented a war. Even if the cast's French is sometimes a tad English, this is a deeply committed recording with some fine performances by Connolly, Brenda Rae as the Princess Elsbeth and Neil Davies as Sparck, a kind of perpetual student. The Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment relish both Offenbach's masterly orchestration and his rhythmic mastery.

Yet, and yet ... the plot lacks the divine silliness of the operettas or the gravitas of *Hoffmann*, though the score often sounds like a rehearsal for Offenbach's unfinished masterpiece. For all that, it's very good to have this lost work recorded so stylishly.

*Christopher Cook*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★



## SPONTINI

### DVD La fuga in maschera

Ruth Rosique, Alessandra Marianelli, Caterina di Tonno, Clemente Daliotti, Alessandro Spina, Dionigi D'Ostuni; I Virtuosi Italiani/Corrado Rovaris; dir. Leo Muscato (Jesi, 2012)  
 EuroArts DVD: 2072648;  
 Blu-ray: 2072644 145 mins  
**BBC Music Direct (DVD) £28.99**  
**BBC Music Direct (Bu-ray) £34.99**

Gaspare Spontini's little *opera buffa* of 1800 was considered a lost work until 2007. A score then turned up in an auction in London and was bought by the municipality of Maiolati Spontini – the composer's birthplace in Italy, renamed after him in 1939. Proud of a composer whose French opera *La Vestale* of 1807 made its creator a figure of European renown, the town now runs a festival jointly in his honour, shared with Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, from nearby Jesi. It is from the small but perfectly formed opera house in the latter town that this 2012 production – apparently the first since 1800 – comes.

A little comedy involving love, class and deception and with a mixed set

of characters, *Flight in Disguise* is no lost masterpiece, though Spontini's score is attractive enough, suggesting him as a link between composers such as Cimarosa and Rossini. The many patter numbers and the energy and the momentum of the finales represent the piece at its best.

Unfortunately the artificial staging doesn't do the opera justice, slight as it is. Leo Muscato's brightly coloured production – Giusi Giustino's costumes come up particularly vividly on Blu-ray – is absurd in tone but makes the plot hard to follow. The cast, though, works hard, and with some individual success. Alessandra Marianelli is a somewhat shrill Corallina, but Ruth Rosique's Elena has a pretty voice and Alessandro Spina's Nastagio is as likable as Clemente Daliotti's Nardullo is engaging. Dionigi D'Ostuni's fake doctor Doralbo, though, is the undoubted star. Corrado Rovaris conducts I Virtuosi Italiani in a capable musical account. *George Hall*  
**PERFORMANCE** ★★  
**PICTURE & SOUND** ★★★★★



## CECILIA BARTOLI:

### St Petersburg

**Arias by Araia, Raupach, Dall'Oglio/Madonis, Manfredini and Cimarosa**  
 Cecilia Bartoli (mezzo-soprano), Silvana Bazzoni (soprano); I Barocchisti/Diego Fasolis  
 Decca 478 6767 77:57 mins

**BBC Music Direct £15.99**

Many people, including the Russians themselves, assume Russian opera began with Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar* (1836). But Cecilia Bartoli's latest disc demonstrates that it started a century earlier with a group of now forgotten composers, brought to the Russian court by a sequence of Empresses – Anna Ioannovna (ruled 1730-40), Elizaveta Petrovna (1741-62) and Catherine II (known as 'the Great', 1762-96).

On these 11 tracks you will hear a stirring March from Hermann Raupach's *Alsesta*, and Bartoli takes a small solo line alongside soprano Silvana Bazzoni (Bartoli's mother and first teacher) in a chorus from Manfredini's *Carlo Magno*. But the bulk of the disc consists of a wide variety of solo arias, some slow and highly expressive, as in the examples from Francesco Domenico Araia's *La forza dell'amore e dell'odio*, or two further arias from *Carlo Magno*; or flamboyantly virtuosic, as in the



cases of the arias from Raupach's *Gerkules* or his *Siroe, re di Persia*. Some are sung in Italian, others are genuinely Russian operas in terms of language as well as cultural context.

At the age of 48 Bartoli's voice is wearing well, and she has been recorded with sensitivity. Some of her faster passagework sounds a little rough around the edges, even fierce, but her technical skills are still remarkable, and in the best items her *bel canto* skills and refinements continue to impress. There's solid and imaginative support from the period-instrument I Barocchisti under Diego Fasolis. *George Hall*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★  
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Pumeza Matshikiza (soprano);  
Aurora Orchestra/Iain Farrington;  
Staatsorchester Stuttgart/Simon Hewett  
Decca 478 7605 50 mins  
**BBC Music Direct** £14.99

Pumeza Matshikiza, a young South African soprano, was brought up in a dismal township with music as her consolation. She studied at London's Royal College of Music, where a decade ago I saw her in many operatic roles and prophesied a big career. For once I seem to have been right: she is now a member of the Stuttgart State Opera, and with her luscious lyric voice and her superb presence and acting she will certainly be a star.

Decca has chosen to market her, in her first album, by selecting a few 'classical' arias – three Puccini and one Mozart – and ten songs of her homeland, sung in Zulu and Xhosa, a Bantu language which mainly dispenses with vowels. Pumeza writes charming introductions to each song and aria, and the texts are given in full. The general impression is delightful, but I hope that this album will be followed soon by one showing that Pumeza is now a serious operatic artist, and not a touring phenomenon who appears on operatic stages when she can. With her remarkable combination of qualities she should be appearing in major roles in the world's great opera houses. *Michael Tanner*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★

## REISSUES

*Reviewed by Nicholas Anderson*

### CAVALLI

**Giasone**  
Chance, Schopper, Dubosc, Deletré,  
Mellon, Banditelli, Visse, Fagotto;  
Concerto Vocale/René Jacobs  
Harmonia Mundi HMY 2921282.84  
(1988) 230:56 mins  
**BBC Music Direct** £14.99 (3 discs)



This is among the most successful of Cavalli's operas on disc. Michael Chance makes a splendid

Jason, blending heroic gesture with sensuous dalliance. Stylish playing.  
**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★

### HANDEL

**Rinaldo**  
Genaux, Kalna, Persson, Zazzo,  
Rutherford, Dumaux, Visse; Freiburger  
Barockorchester/René Jacobs  
Harmonia Mundi HMY 2921796.98  
(2003) 213 mins  
**BBC Music Direct** £14.99 (3 discs)



Handel's first opera for London is treated with great dramatic energy. Jacobs can be controversial but alluring singing by Genaux in the title role is worth compromise.

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★

### GLUCK

**Orfeo ed Euridice**  
Fink, Cangemi, Kiehr;  
RIAS Kammerchor; Freiburger  
Barockorchester/René Jacobs  
Harmonia Mundi HMY 2921742.43 (2001)  
90:44 mins (2 discs)  
**BBC Music Direct** £14.99



Here is Gluck's earliest version of this opera. Jacobs, having once himself sung the title role, now directs a satisfying performance with Bernarda Fink as Orpheus.

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★

### PURCELL

**Dido and Aeneas**  
Pudwell, Harvey, Haller, Duthoit, Maire,  
White; Le Concert Spirituel/Niquet  
Glossa GCD C8160 (2001) 49:30 mins  
**BBC Music Direct** £11.99



An elegant recording in which Laura Pudwell comes over as a touching Dido. Notwithstanding strong vocal contributions, the performance lacks drama.

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★

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# CHORAL & SONG

*Simon Rattle* and *Peter Sellars* join forces for JS Bach's *St John Passion*; *Matthias Goerne* brings beauty to Schubert's *Winterreise*; and Vaughan Williams's *Cambridge Mass* is premiered on disc

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### Dignified Mozart

*George Hall* welcomes Accentus's fresh take on a familiar classic



**DETAILED NOTES:**  
Laurence Equilbey lavishes care on Mozart



#### MOZART

##### Requiem

Sandrine Piau, Sara Mingardo, Werner Güra, Christopher Purves; Accentus; Insula Orchestra/Laurence Equilbey  
Naïve V5370 48 mins

**BBC Music Direct £14.99**

This Mozart Requiem recording benefits from the ecclesiastical acoustic of the Chapelle Royale de Versailles, which gives an aptly warm liturgical resonance. In terms of size and balance, the 36-strong choir matches well with the 39-strong period-instrument orchestra, whose internal balance is excellent and whose pair of basset horns is an especial delight.

Balance generally – independent parts within the choir, instruments within the orchestra, and choir versus orchestra – is superbly managed by the experienced conductor, Laurence Equilbey. Her flowing, motivated performance delivers a familiar work in its familiar Süssmayr completion

#### Laurence Equilbey avoids any excesses of expression

but without any of the excess of expression sometimes associated with a piece that comes with all the baggage of Mozartian mortality and myth – though there's rightly a compelling touch of fierceness to the Confutatis. In general, though, expression is discreet and not overdone, giving back to the Requiem all of its essential dignity

rather than offering it as a purely dramatic experience.

Her soloists, too, match well as a quartet, though Christopher Purves offers a bass-baritone rather than a full bass on the lowest line and Sandrine Piau's soprano is a little straighter and lacking in warmth compared to the other voices – Sara Mingardo's warmly maternal contralto and Werner Güra's keenly focused tenor in particular. And for all Equilbey's avoidance of theatricality it's the sense of detail, care and attention she imparts as well as fluency that makes her interpretation memorable.

**PERFORMANCE ★★★★★**  
**RECORDING ★★★★★**



#### ON THE WEBSITE

Hear extracts from this recording and the rest of this month's choices on the **BBC Music Magazine website**  
[www.classical-music.com](http://www.classical-music.com)



#### JS BACH

##### Mass in B minor

Lydia Teuscher, Ida Falk Winland, Tim Mead, Samuel Boden, Neal Davies; Arcangelo/Jonathan Cohen  
Hyperion CDA 68051/2 114:42 mins  
(2 discs)

**BBC Music Direct £28.99**

From the highways of Handel and Monteverdi to the byways of Porpora and Hasse, Arcangelo's discs for Hyperion so far have all championed vocal music. Now Jonathan Cohen's ensemble supersedes for that Everest on the choral landscape: Bach's Mass in B minor. Recorded around a performance at last year's Tetbury Festival, Cohen's take side-steps Joshua Rifkin's premise that it should be sung one-to-a-part and fields a choir of 20. Numerically, it's roughly midway between the Dunedin Consort's intimate account on Linn and Ton Koopman's buoyant Warner set with his Amsterdam forces. Stylistically, though, Cohen often seems closer in spirit to Philippe Herreweghe, and for all the scrupulous phrasing of the opening five-part Kyrie fugue, there's something almost over-smooth about the flow and saturnine density. Koopman coaxes more light and shade from the music and brings the section in with two minutes to spare.

Radiantly sung by Lydia Teuscher and Ida Falk Winland, the Christe Eleison helps to oxygenate things. And the opening of the Gloria is exuberantly 'swung' before Cohen applies the brakes for an Et in terra pax that subsequently enters a trance. But it's the only major questionable calculation in this Gloria, which boasts the entwining mellifluous accord of the *Domine Deus* (where Teuscher is joined by Samuel Boden), and the fruity *corno da caccia* and bassoons of the *Quoniam tu solus*. Cohen announces the Credo at an invigoratingly purposeful lick, and





**TREASURES REVEALED:**  
The Brabant Ensemble  
showcases Brumel

if not all the details in the whirling Sanctus register, Tim Mead's eloquently restrained Agnus Dei is crowned by a *Dona nobis pacem* whose blazing grandiloquence grips. *Paul Riley*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★



## JS BACH

### DVD St John Passion

Mark Padmore, Christian Gerhaher, Camilla Tilling, Magdalena Kožená, Topi Lehtipuu, Roderick Williams; Berlin Radio Choir/Simon Halsey; Berlin Philharmonic/Simon Rattle; dir. Peter Sellars (Berlin, 2014)  
BPHR 140031 135+52 mins  
(2 DVDs + 1 blu-ray)  
[www.berliner-philharmoniker.de](http://www.berliner-philharmoniker.de)

Director Peter Sellars described his 2010 'ritualisation' of JS Bach's *St Matthew Passion* thus: 'It's not theatre. It's a prayer'. Turning now to the altogether different *St John Passion*, prayer is subsumed within something intrinsically dramatic; meshing politics, guilt, betrayal and human weakness. Sellars's aim, as he explains in a typically compelling and articulate 'bonus' discussion with Simon Rattle, is to 'make the music visible', and that 'visibility' ranges from the heart-achingly poetic to the distractingly banal. How much more evocative is the stilled image of the raised hand for the scourging of Christ compared to the mimed literalism of the servant

having his ear cut off. Sometimes, though, that division is not so clear-cut. The jabbing fingers of the ever more enflamed chorus, or the gleeful rattling of the dice as the soldiers cast lots for Jesus's robe make the music 'visible' in an unexpectedly illuminating way.

But then Sellars is an intrinsically 'musical' director. The carefully calibrated and differently articulated cries of 'Herr' in the opening chorus are explained and mirrored by the imploring arms that wave like sea anemones caught in a freak eddy. Close your eyes and, as with a few other gestures in Simon Rattle's rigorously incisive musical direction of his Berlin forces, the effect could sound mannered. Watch, and everything falls into place.

The *St Matthew Passion* team of 2010 – which won a BBC Music Magazine DVD award in 2013 – has been reassembled, apart from bass-baritone Thomas Quasthoff whose retirement from the concert stage admits baritone Roderick Williams into the fold. In the event Williams's Christ all but steals the show – even alongside tenor Mark Padmore whose Evangelist fearlessly interrogates as well as interprets the narrative, and baritone Christian Gerhaher's wonderfully multi-layered Pilate.

The pacing of Part One is sometimes problematic. Tenor Topi Lehtipuu can sound effortful, and soprano Camilla Tilling's 'Zerfließe mein Herze' doesn't fully engage. Yet despite the unevenness, this *St John Passion* has a thought-provoking and unsettling authenticity that can be overwhelming. *Paul Riley*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**PICTURE & SOUND** ★★★★★  
**EXTRAS** ★★★★★



## BRAHMS

**Warum ist das Licht gegeben dem Mühseligen, Op. 74/1; Intermezzo, Op. 119/1; Five Songs, Op. 104; Schicksalslied, Op. 54; Three Motets, Op. 110; Three Quartets; Fest- und Gedenksprüche, Op. 109**  
Cappella Amsterdam/Daniel Reuss; Philip Mayers (piano)

Harmonia Mundi HMC902160  
70:08 mins

**BBC Music Direct** £14.99

At the end of the opening paragraph in Brahms's unaccompanied motet *Warum ist das Licht gegeben?* the choir is asked to decrescendo abruptly on the word 'Warum'. It's difficult to do this convincingly, and a signal of the superior standards reached on this CD is that Cappella Amsterdam does it perfectly, achieving a smooth, unanimous, unaffected tapering-off of tone to the cusp of virtual silence.

The reading as a whole is beautifully shaped and articulated by conductor Daniel Reuss – the fugal writing honed with an edge of anxious interrogation, the sopranos airborne with a sense of light and levitation on 'Lasset uns', the whole choir serenely accepting of the dying fall sounding the work's conclusion.

There's serenity too in the *Schicksalslied*, performed here in a four-hand piano version. Reuss's vibrato-light sopranos make a significant mark, soaring rapturously in the idyllic first half of the setting. When turbulence strikes, the attack of the singers is strong and decisive, although the clattery piano writing is

a clear second best to the more usual orchestral accompaniment.

In a lighter vein are the lilting rhythms of *Abendlied*, deftly accompanied by Philip Mayers, who also contributes a sentient account of the Op. 119/1 Intermezzo for solo piano. All told, this is an excellent collection of choral Brahms by a choir convincingly tuned in to the idiom. *Terry Blain*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★



## BRUMEL

**Nato canunt omnia; Beata es, Maria; Lauda Sion salvatorem; Ave caelorum domina; Missa de beata virgine**

The Brabant Ensemble/Stephen Rice  
Hyperion CDA 68065 64:01 mins

**BBC Music Direct** £13.99

With their litany of recordings over the last decade, the Brabant Ensemble and its director Stephen Rice have dusted off some real treasures of 16th-century music from the Low Countries. Their latest offering explores one of the most distinctive, though surprisingly neglected, composers active around 1500: Antoine Brumel.

The programme showcases his heterogeneous style, from robust and exuberant motets to more delicate pieces fragrant with Marian piety, and from elaborate, polyphonic, poly-textual works to spare, simple expressions of devotion.

In the *Missa de beata virgine*, the light, agile voices of the ensemble articulate the percussive energy of Brumel's rhythms – a characteristic that differentiates his music from the more liquid, lyrical style of his contemporaries. The singers' clean attack and precise ensemble highlight the pervasive syncopations and cross-rhythms, as well as the occasional shocking dissonance. Scott Joplin, eat your heart out! Rice gives brisk momentum to the festive Christmas motet *Nato canunt omnia*, and the group's radiant sound – superbly captured in the open, silvery recording – illuminates the multiple texts of this glittering musical mosaic. Detailed CD liner notes reveal Rice's fastidious scholarship behind the scenes, making the project a fine balance of insightful musicological research and seraphic singing. *Kate Bolton*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★



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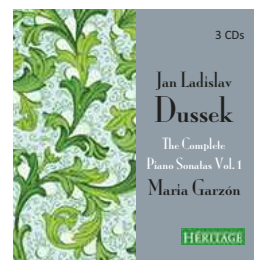
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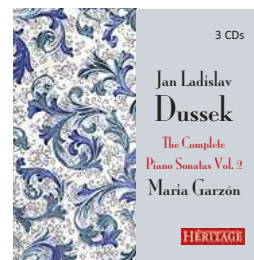
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## JACKSON

**The Voice of the Bard; Ruchill Linn; Airplane Cantata; Winter Heavens; Choral Symphony**

Rex Lawson (pianola); BBC Singers/  
David Hill, James Morgan  
Signum SIGCD381 68:47 mins

**BBC Music Direct £12.99**

Rex Lawson has an Old Testament look about him, and one of the longest beards in photographic history. His pianola contribution to Gabriel Jackson's *Airplane Cantata* does much to create the illusion that the piece is swirling vertiginously in the ether, especially in the, loop-the-looping 'Flight' movement. The piece is fun, for sure, if text-heavy, and I'm not sure the voice-over section is totally convincing. The BBC Singers work their usual wonders in making anything you throw at them sound confident and fully assimilated. Tenor Stephen Jeffes's virtuoso arabesquerie in 'Overture: Icarus' deserves special mention.

The *Choral Symphony* is more varied in tone, and structurally more ambitious. Its subject is nothing less than London itself, depicted by 13 texts arranged into four separate movements. The demands placed on the choir are eye-watering, and occasionally there's a suspicion that Jackson spins notes dazzlingly simply

## BACKGROUND TO...



**Roger Quilter**  
(1877-1953)

Almost exclusively a composer of song, Roger Quilter studied

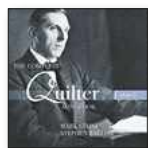
at Eton and in Frankfurt. His *Four Songs of the Sea* brought him to national attention in 1901, and his reputation flourished thanks in part to the famous tenor Gervase Elwes, who championed his music. In more than a hundred songs, Quilter honed his fluent melodic style and love of subtle, involved piano accompaniments. His favourite poets were Shakespeare, Herrick, Shelley and Blake. Peter Warlock described Quilter's music as an important 'genial influence', without which he wouldn't have composed song.

MARCO BORGREVE

because he's able to, and because he likes to see them spinning. The performance, conducted by David Hill, is again wonderfully resourceful and committed.

Of the shorter works the jagged, expressionistic outcrops of *Winter Heavens* are specially interesting. All but one work here is a premiere recording. *Terry Blain*

**PERFORMANCE ★★★★★**  
**RECORDING ★★★★★**



## QUILTER

**Five Jacobean Lyrics; Two songs, 1903; Fairy Lullaby; Three Songs of William Blake; Island of Dreams; At Close of Day; The Answer; Five English love lyrics; My heart adorned with Thee; Three songs for baritone or tenor; April love; Two songs, 1897; Spring Voices; Four songs of the sea; Tulips; To Julia**  
Mark Stone (baritone),  
Stephen Barlow (piano)

Stone Records 5060192780307 77 mins  
**BBC Music Direct £13.99**

Quilter's songs feature in many English song recitals, but this second volume of Mark Stone and Stephen Barlow's excellent complete edition confirms that they're more than mere programme-fillers. This wealthy Old Etonian might be mistaken for a patrician amateur, but he was a serious musician who studied in Germany alongside Percy Grainger and others, and wrote successful operas, light music, and more than a hundred songs (see left).

Heard together, their individuality becomes more evident, sprightly and limpidly lyrical in a characteristically Edwardian manner; they influenced Philip 'Peter Warlock' Heseltine and others. They lack Vaughan Williams's dynamic originality, perhaps, yet they have deeply felt undercurrents, sometimes a melancholy hinting at Quilter's ill health, repressed sexuality and mental decline after his nephew's murder in World War Two. They're mostly strongest when they embody Quilter's response to some already powerful poetry, from Shakespeare and the Earl of Rochester to Byron, Blake and Keats; Quilter's own early lyrics sound distinctly weedy.

The concluding Herrick sequence *To Julia* is particularly good. Stone's high, slightly grainy baritone and incisive diction deliver Quilter's often long, soaring lines with compelling fervour, and Barlow's fluent



**EXTREME EXPRESSION:**  
Matthias Goerne sings  
Schubert with intensity

accompaniment is the opposite of the dreaded effete tinkling sometimes inflicted on these songs.

*Michael Scott Rohan*

**PERFORMANCE ★★★★★**  
**RECORDING ★★★★★**



## SCHUBERT

**Winterreise**  
Matthias Goerne (baritone),  
Christoph Eschenbach (piano)  
Harmonia Mundi HMC 902107  
74:54 mins

**BBC Music Direct £14.99**

These two remarkable artists, each with a strong musical personality, adopt a daring strategy for their recording of this extraordinary masterpiece, which only gets greater the more one hears it. For the first 19 of the 24 songs they steer a moderate course: Matthias Goerne sings beautifully, only rarely letting rip, and Christoph Eschenbach is far less idiosyncratic than I expected. But for the last four songs they take expression to extremes, with devastating effect.

They take *Das Wirthaus*, with its hymn-like melody and harmonies, more slowly than any other song in the cycle and than I have ever heard it. They enlarge their dynamic range enormously and by the end of the cycle, a few minutes later, I felt that my pain was on a level with the hopeless wanderer's. There are so many ways of interpreting this, Schubert's greatest work, that it would be silly to say this was the most impressive: one might take issue with

the restraint practised in the earlier songs, where many other singers, Brigitte Fassbaender above all, are wrenching from the start. And there are other fine performances where one is given room for different possible responses. I want both of these styles and others too, but this one, wonderfully recorded and always beautiful despite its violence, is among the great accounts.

*Michael Tanner*

**PERFORMANCE ★★★★★**  
**RECORDING ★★★★★**



## SCHUMANN

**Scenes from Goethe's Faust**  
Christian Gerhaher, Christiane Karg,  
Alastair Miles, Mari Eriksmoen, Bernarda Fink, Andrew Staples, Kurt Rydl, Tareq Nazmi; Bavarian Radio Symphony Choir & Orchestra/Daniel Harding  
BR Klassik 900122 115:40 mins (2 discs)  
**BBC Music Direct £20.99**

Goethe thought Mozart the only composer who could have set *Faust*, but it's Schumann, to my mind, who comes closest – much closer than Mahler's Eighth Symphony. Goethe's verse shifts constantly from folksy simplicity to high expression, and Schumann's fluent melodies and choral richness reflect this, by turns sombre, soaring and exultant in Part II's vision of Faust's death and redemption, and lyrical and tragic in Part I's romance. After initial popularity the *Faust Scenes* became a rarity, first recorded only in 1972 by Benjamin Britten, conducting a superb cast headed by



Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. Despite reduced orchestration this remains a benchmark, approached only by Claudio Abbado's superbly dramatic live performance with an even more stellar line-up including Bryn Terfel, Karita Matila and Susan Graham. Of subsequent versions, Nikolaus Harnoncourt offers an airy, spacious reading and good soloists, many of whom also appear here – apparently because Harnoncourt was originally scheduled to conduct.

Daniel Harding, former Wunderkind now well established, achieves similarly spacious results. He shapes some elegant playing and clear choral textures, and there's some fine solo singing, notably from Christiane Karg, Bernarda Fink and Andrew Staples. However, Christian Gerhaher and Alastair Miles, intelligent Faust and sardonic Mephistopheles respectively, were fresher for Harnoncourt, and veteran Kurt Rydl's bass has turned leathery. Surprisingly, too, Harding's Part II sounds relatively prosaic and earthbound, and as a whole he doesn't rival Claudio Abbado for drama or Britten for poetry; while Antoni Wit's Naxos version, despite some choral roughness, is also much more involving, at bargain price.

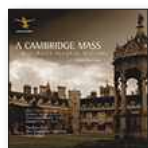
Michael Scott Rohan

PERFORMANCE

RECORDING

★★★★

★★★★



## VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

A Cambridge Mass

PARRY

Blest Pair of Sirens

Olivia Robinson, Rebecca Lodge, Christopher Bowen, Edward Price; Martin Ennis (organ), The Bach Choir, New Queen's Hall Orchestra/ Alan Tongue

Albion ABCD020 56:13 mins

BBC Music Direct £11.99

It might seem a dubious idea to take out of mothballs a work written specifically for its composer's Doctor of Music degree – surely a recipe for academic conformity and little else? Coming from Vaughan Williams, however, *A Cambridge Mass* also contains material of genuine quality. Completed in 1899 during the composer's postgraduate years at Cambridge's Trinity College, the score then lay forgotten in the University Library, until its unveiling for this world premiere live performance in March 2011.

The mass has only two choral movements, the Credo and the Sanctus, both of them set on an expansive scale, with a central Offertory as an orchestral interlude. If the Credo is about Vaughan Williams displaying his formidable academic skills as required (complete with a sizeable fugal 'Amen'), the Sanctus shows more of the artist he was to become, with its serene canonic writing for double chorus. And while the Offertory operates in the Bruch-to-Dvořák territory of the times, it does so with engaging freshness. The performance has a likeable buzz of atmosphere, with four decently blending soloists, and pleasing orchestral playing on period instruments. A larger choral line-up would have been welcome (Parry's *Blest Pair of Sirens* feels underpowered), but the sound itself is good. *Malcolm Hayes*

PERFORMANCE

★★★★

RECORDING

★★★★



## ADORAMUS TE

Motets, songs and consort music by Byrd and Philips

Clare Wilkinson (mezzo-soprano);

The Rose Consort of Viols

Deux-Elles DXL1155 73 mins

BBC Music Direct £14.99

Both William Byrd (1540-1623) and Peter Philips (c1560-1628) had, in different ways, a difficult time during the Protestant reign of Elizabeth I. Their Catholic sympathies have been neatly captured on this disc – Byrd's in an astonishing group of songs and Latin pieces celebrating Catholic services and those put to death by what he describes in *Wretched Albinus* as 'a silly woman'; and Philips's by a sprinkling of works showing the influence of Roman styles and continental madrigals.

The playing by the Rose Consort is refined and balanced without any of the bass-heavy fuzziness that one sometimes hears from viol groups. In the two Trios by Philips they are particularly poised, though in the galliards their pace is somewhat sluggish. The motets are performed with just one of the parts being sung – a practice attested to from the period. Luckily that voice belongs to the experienced and reliable Clare Wilkinson. She dances through the lively *Attolite portas* by Philips, but in *Viae Sion* even she cannot quite persuade the viol part with which she sings a canon, to create a responsive

AUSTRIAN OPULENCE:  
Renée Fleming pays  
tribute to Vienna



dialogue, and in some of the songs (*With lilies white*) one misses a certain tenderness (albeit of an Elizabethan kind). *Anthony Pryer*

PERFORMANCE

★★★★

RECORDING

★★★★



## A RECITAL WITH RENÉE FLEMING

DVD Songs by Wolf, Mahler, Schoenberg, Zemlinsky, Korngold, R Strauss, J Strauss II & Gershwin

Renée Fleming (soprano), Maciej Pikulski (piano)

Arthaus Musik DVD: 102 196;

Blu-ray: 108 117 88 mins

BBC Music Direct (DVD) £20.99

BBC Music Direct (Blu-ray) £34.99

Unlike most conventional lieder recitals, Renée Fleming's affectionate musical tribute to Vienna, given in the opulent setting of the city's Musikverein, focuses on a rather limited time-span. It encompasses repertoire composed between the late 1880s and the mid 1930s – a period marking the transition between the late-Romantic era and modernism. The American soprano cleverly devised programme features composers with closely connected stylistic and personal affiliations, but on the whole avoids the more harmonically exploratory language

cultivated by members of the Second Viennese School.

It's quite a gamble to open such a recital with some of Wolf's most intense settings of Goethe. Indeed I feel that Fleming's voice isn't quite in the zone in such works as 'Die Bekehrte' and here Maciej Pikulski's piano accompaniments seem a little too self-effacing. Things warm up considerably, however, in the Mahler *Rückert-Lieder*. Although this song-cycle is perhaps best appreciated in the composer's orchestral version rather than with piano, Fleming builds up a great sense of pathos in 'Um Mitternacht' and delivers a deeply affecting account of 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen' supported by some wonderfully sensitive phrasing from Pikulski.

A striking change of dress, from rich navy blue to a luxuriant gold, for the second half of her programme seems to galvanise Fleming to produce an even more involving musical experience as she steers us through the challenging waters of Schoenberg's tonally ambiguous 'Erwartung' and 'Jane Grey' as well as the emotionally elusive Dehmel settings of Zemlinsky. But perhaps the composer with whom Fleming most closely identifies is Korngold, represented here by a varied selection of intensely romantic and nostalgic songs which are beautifully projected by singer and pianist. In the inevitable sequence of encores, Fleming's heartfelt and wonderfully sumptuous rendering of 'Marietta's Lied' from *Die tote Stadt* brings the



somewhat demure Viennese audience to its feet. *Erik Levi*

PERFORMANCE

PICTURE AND SOUND

★★★★

★★★★



### AMARCORD: *The Book of Madrigals*

**DVD** Works by Dowland, Lassus, Vecchi, Gesualdo, Josquin, Donato, Encina, Gombert and others

Amarcord; Hille Perl (viola da gamba), Lee Santana (theorbo & guitar), Michael Metzler (percussion)

Accentus ACC 20304 76:52 mins

**BBC Music Direct £20.99**

Palladio's Villa Godi in north Italy provides a sumptuous setting for this eclectic programme of Renaissance songs and madrigals which scale the gamut of human emotions. We hear Dowland as if it were a dinner party conversation, with the singers seated around a table (as the composer himself encouraged); ribald songs are accompanied with a glass of wine by the fireside; flickering candles and starlit skies provide evocative settings for tenebrous and valedictory madrigals, while the Villa Godi's *trompe l'oeil* frescoes make a theatrical backdrop for comic works and parodies.

The male-voice quintet Amarcord was founded over 20 years ago by members of the Thomanerchor – the historic Leipzig boys' choir long associated with JS Bach. There's no doubting the singers' pedigree – diction, ensemble and intonation are all impeccable – and they are highly responsive to the changing moods and innuendos (often none too subtle) of the texts. Gambist Hille Perl, Lee Santana (theorbo and guitar) and Michael Metzler (percussion) provide spirited instrumental playing, highlighting the exuberant and pervasive dance rhythms. Musically, this provides a veritable banquet.

The challenges of filming this repertoire, though, are similar to those of filming an opera: close-ups and individual mannerisms can be distracting, and the sense of theatre is often lost through the sharp focus of a camera lens. I found myself sometimes tempted to follow a score or close my eyes and wallow in the fine singing of this accomplished ensemble. *Kate Bolton*

PERFORMANCE

PICTURE & SOUND

★★★★

★★★★

## REISSUES

Reviewed by *Erik Levi*

### BEETHOVEN

*Missa Solemnis*

Farrell, Smith, Lewis, Borg; Westminster Choir; New York Phil/Bernstein  
Alto ALC 1240 (1960) 76:32 mins

**BBC Music Direct £6.99**



Bernstein's first recording of the *Missa Solemnis* is notable for its high-voltage theatrical impact and committed choral singing. Introspective moments are hampered by close miking.

PERFORMANCE

RECORDING

★★★★

★★★★

### ELGAR

*The Apostles*

Hargan, Hodgson, Rendall, Terfel, Roberts, Lloyd; LSO & Chorus/Hickox  
Chandos CHAN 241-49 (1990) 126:53 mins

**BBC Music Direct £13.99 (2 discs)**



Supported by a strong cast of soloists, Hickox delivers a warmly expressive and subtly nuanced interpretation which really catches fire in the more inspired second part of Elgar's oratorio.

PERFORMANCE

RECORDING

★★★★

★★★★★

### MENDELSSOHN

*Elijah (sung in English)*

White, Plowright, Finnie, Davies, Budd; LSO & Chorus/Hickox  
Chandos CHAN 241-48 (1989) 131:24 mins

**BBC Music Direct £13.99 (2 discs)**



A full-blooded account with a particularly stirring contribution from the LSO Chorus.

White's commanding presence as Elijah is slightly marred by some passages with wobbly vibrato.

PERFORMANCE

RECORDING

★★★★

★★★★

### MENDELSSOHN

*Elias (sung in German)*

Soloists; La Chapelle Royale & Collegium Vocale Gent; Orchestre des Champs-Élysées/Philippe Herreweghe  
Harmonia Mundi HMY 2921463.64 (1993) 127:29 mins

**BBC Music Direct £14.99 (2 discs)**



Herreweghe wipes away layers of Victorian fustiness in this lean-textured, rhythmically

incisive performance on period instruments. Effective soloists, lacking the last ounce of drama.

PERFORMANCE

RECORDING

★★★★

★★★★★

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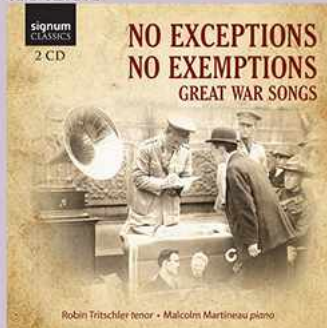
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# CHAMBER

*Renaud Capuçon* and *Arabella Steinbacher* give alternative views on Franck's Violin Sonata; plus *Martha Argerich* and *Daniel Barenboim* sit down at the piano for Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*

## MUSIC CHAMBER CHOICE

### A Renaissance Grand Tour

*Kate Bolton* enjoys the rich flavours of viol consort music

**LOW-KEY AUTHENTICITY:**  
the Rose Consort of Viols play on gut strings with period tuning



#### **SERENISSIMA:** *Music from Renaissance Europe on Venetian Viols*

**Works by** Festa, Isaac, Verdelot, Lassus, Senfl, Le Jeune, Susato, Sandrin, Rore, Bassano, Tye, Parsley, Wilder, Byrd, Parsons & Holborne

Rose Consort of Viols  
Delphian DCD 34149 71:24 mins

**BBC Music Direct** £14.99

The Rose Consort here embarks on a Grand Tour of 16th-century viol music, drifting through the cities and courts of Italy, Germany and France to its final port of call in England.

Intricate fantasias and contrapuntal discourses entwine with dances, both stately and sprightly, and – fully in keeping with Renaissance practice – instrumental arrangements of madrigals, songs and sacred works. This musical kaleidoscope turns through dark hued reflections and

#### **The authentic period tuning gives a tang to the dissonances**

light-filled reveries, yet the sequence retains its coherence thanks to the sensitively judged programming.

The performances are distinctive in that the players use a set of newly built viols based on the earliest surviving 16th-century instrument by the Venetian maker Francesco Linarol. Strung with gut at a

relatively low tension, they yield a delicate, veiled, subtly resonant sound, and the period tuning gives a tang to the dissonances and remote key excursions.

Technically, the Rose Consort is well-nigh flawless, and these restrained, refined readings, informed by a deep understanding of the viol and its repertoire, evoke the finesse and grace of the celebrated Renaissance courts. In short, the playing is, to borrow Castiglione's words in *The Courtier*, 'soavissima e artificiosa' – 'sweet and artful'.

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★



#### **ON THE WEBSITE**

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#### **BEETHOVEN**

**Cello Sonatas Nos 1-5; Variations: on 'Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen'; on 'See, the Conqu'ring Hero comes'; on 'Bei Männern welche Liebe fühlen'**

Jean-Guihen Queyras (cello), Alexander Melnikov (piano)  
Harmonia Mundi HMC 902183-84  
138:40 mins (2 discs)

**BBC Music Direct** £19.99

Beethoven's music for cello and piano covers all his composing periods and a vast range of styles from the playful Op. 5 Sonatas to the terse power of the Op. 101. If Miklós Perényi with András Schiff (ECM), and Steven Isserlis with Robert Levin on fortepiano (Hyperion) are convincing advocates at opposite ends of the interpretative spectrum, Jean-Guihen Queyras and Alexander Melnikov offer a middle way.

This superb recording achieves a rare balance between Melnikov's miraculous transparency and Queyras's airy, limpid elegance, and non-vibratoed purity of sound. Their approach is ideal in the filigree exuberance of the three Variation works where Melnikov's witty sense of timing sets up a delicious teasing tension, and in the quicksilver mischief of the F major Sonata. I love the innocent ardour of their G minor Sonata, too. The duo reaches radiant heights in the sublime Sonata No. 3, where Queyras steals in like a gleam of morning sun and delivers the *Allegro*'s flourishes with violinistic fluidity. Only in the late sonatas did I begin to miss the range of expression found by either Perényi or Isserlis. Queyras occasionally plays too safe: a degree of dark energy and recklessness is missing from the *Allegro vivace* of No. 4 and No. 5's *Allegro fugato*. Nonetheless, I will be savouring these refined readings for a long time.

*Helen Wallace*  
**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★





## CUTLER

**Boogie Nights; Slippery Music; Comfortable Music; Extended Play; Music for Parakeets; Folk Music**  
Darragh Morgan (violin), Lionel Handy (cello), Mary Dullea, Nigel Clayton (piano); Schubert Ensemble; Coull Quartet; Orkest de Ereprijs/Wim Boerman; Decibel/Daniele Rosina  
Birmingham Record Company 50:41 mins  
[birminghamrecordcompany.com](http://birminghamrecordcompany.com)

The titles listed in *Boogie Nights* capture the flavour of Cutler's vivid and mischievous sound-world. The six works recorded were written from 2007-2013 and, while loosely bound by Cutler's post-minimalist aesthetic, are a delicious miscellany.

Commissioned and flamboyantly performed by Orkest de Ereprijs, the title track is a riot of circus psychedelia, bounding and fluttering across its five snappy sections with snippets of 1970s funk and the whirling tones of a 1920s mechanical organ. Fragments of the Baroque and late-Classical find their way into two of the disc's chamber works: *Slippery Music*, commissioned and performed by the Schubert Ensemble, is an irreverent reimagining of the *Trout* Quintet (for the same forces), while the deftly performed *Comfortable Music* for violin and piano invokes the rhythmic poise and energy of the Baroque (alongside a central movement marked 'like some Roadhouse Music'). The unexpectedly affecting *Folk Music* closes the disc, drawing on looping scraps of Polish 'Goralski' music that steadily and joyfully cohere, all performed with wonderful zest by the Coull Quartet. *Kate Wakeling*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★



## DEBUSSY • TAKEMITSU GUBAIDULINA

**Debussy: Sonata for flute, viola and harp; Gubaidulina: Garden of Joys and Sorrows; Takemitsu: And then I knew 'twas Wind**  
Tre Voci: Marina Piccinini (flute), Kim Kashkashian (viola), Sivan Magen (harp)  
ECM 4810880 51 mins  
BBC Music Direct £14.99

The combination of flute, viola and harp is synonymous with Debussy.

**IN DEBUSSY'S HONOUR:**  
Tre Voci play works inspired by his Trio



His extraordinary Sonata of 1915 written for these instruments is one of a handful of works that define an instrumental grouping. This makes it an obvious centrepiece for the first release from Tre Voci, a new ensemble that sees viola player Kim Kashkashian joined by harpist Sivan Magen and the mellifluous flautist Marina Piccinini. Placing the Debussy between Takemitsu's *And then I knew 'twas Wind* and Gubaidulina's *Garten von Freuden und Traurigkeiten* (Garden of Joys and Sorrows), they underline the quietly progressive soul of a work sometimes taken for a nostalgic harkening back.

Tre Voci's exceptional musicianship makes apparent the creative kinship between these three beautiful works. The Debussy Sonata inhabits an enchanted world full of radical textures and figurations in which the musical line is not merely passed among the instruments, but each seems to be in a constant of mutation within the beguiling whole. Tre Voci brave the potentially harsh light of a close recording so that every nuance is captured, and Debussy's work emerges sounding contemporaneous with the more recent works.

While both Takemitsu and Gubaidulina persistently use unusual instrumental techniques, Tre Voci ensure these often delicate inflections are a natural, effortless part of the texture and musical line. They are not attention-seeking quirks, but a continuation of Debussy's love of playing with subtle colours.

*Christopher Dingle*  
**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★



## FRANCK • GRIEG DVORÁK

**Franck: Violin Sonata; Grieg: Violin Sonata No. 3; Dvořák: Four Romantic Pieces**

Renaud Capuçon (violin),  
Khatia Buniatishvili (piano)  
Erato 2564625018 66:20 mins

BBC Music Direct £12.99

Martha Argerich acted as artistic matchmaker for the pairing of Renaud Capuçon and Khatia Buniatishvili and, as might be expected, there is no lack of personality here. The choice of three striking, almost contemporaneous yet diverse works gives their partnership a thorough workout. Moreover, with such a humdinger of a finale as the Franck, and that of Grieg's Third Sonata barely less gripping, it is commendably brave to end in elegaic style with Dvořák's *Romantic Pieces*.

For much of the time Capuçon and Buniatishvili are alive to the tiniest detail, in the opening of the Franck lingering tellingly over key notes, with real flexibility of the broader tempo. Their approach may risk seeming indulgent, but is utterly convincing in the moment with so many hair-raising details. It is odd, then, that there are instances – such as in the Finale of the Franck and the first movement of the Grieg – where they suddenly appear to have little to say. Otherwise this is enthralling playing and nicely recorded, though a gap of more than

seven seconds is needed to recover from the Franck. *Christopher Dingle*  
**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★



## FRANCK • R STRAUSS

**Violin Sonatas**

Arabella Steinbacher (violin),  
Robert Kulek (piano)  
Pentatone PTC 5186470 (hybrid CD/SACD)  
58:05 mins

BBC Music Direct £15.99

These violin sonatas make an effective pairing. Composed in 1886 and 1887 respectively, Franck's perennial favourite comes from the golden era of his maturity, while Strauss had barely begun his long career and was still finding his creative voice. Yet the Strauss is hardly a rarity, thanks to Jascha Heifetz's sustained advocacy, and the Franck is such a stalwart of the repertoire that any newcomer faces stiff competition.

Arabella Steinbacher and Robert Kulek give elegant and tasteful accounts, Steinbacher's crystalline high register shining particularly in the first movement of the Franck, as well as in the often joyous textures of the Strauss. Kulek is a sure-footed partner and there is no lack of virtuosity from either player, while Pentatone's surround sound is typically gorgeous. With such a throaty tone in the frenzied second movement of the Franck, Steinbacher could scarcely be described as strait-laced, but there is little of the natural nuance and fluidity of the truly outstanding performances. Augustin Dumay and Louis Lortie (Onyx) give so much more in both works, as well as including several shorter pieces.

*Christopher Dingle*  
**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★



## MENDELSSOHN

**Piano Trios Nos 1 & 2; Song Without Words, Op. 109; Albumblatt für Julius Rietz; Variations concertantes in D, Op. 17**

Gould Piano Trio  
Champs Hill CHRCD 088 72:33 mins  
BBC Music Direct £14.99  
This is the Gould Piano Trio's second recording of the Mendelssohn Trios, their first being on Naxos back in

2001. Their approach has changed little in terms of the basic tempo for each movement; but now there's a greater degree of characterisation to the violin and cello parts and more subtlety in Benjamin Frith's texturing of the piano. Champs Hill's recording is also superior in projecting both the clarity and warmth of these works.

I was initially surprised by their rather elegant approach to the D minor Trio's opening. What of Mendelssohn's tempo marking *molto agitato*? In the event, my misgivings proved unfounded. The Goulds build up quite a head of steam, making the movement's closing bars sound particularly urgent and impassioned. A similar tactic is adopted in the C minor Trio's Finale. It, too, opens rather unassuming, but grows in intensity as the players drive convincingly towards the final triumphal statement of the chorale theme. Elsewhere, there is brilliance and dexterity in both *Scherzos*, and the slow movements are warmly projected without sentimentality.

Mendelssohn's shorter cello works make a welcome bonus, particularly given Alice Neary's highly expressive playing. The advertised *Albumblatt*, Op. 117 for solo piano, though, turns out to be the recently discovered and charming *Albumblatt für Julius Rietz* for cello and piano. Erik Levi

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★



## MOZART • SCHUBERT STRAVINSKY

**Mozart: Sonata for Two Pianos, K448; Schubert: Variations on an Original Theme, D813; Stravinsky: Le sacre du printemps**  
Daniel Barenboim,  
Martha Argerich (piano)  
DG 479 3922 75:27 mins

**BBC Music Direct £14.99**  
Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* prompts several adjectives: brutal, revolutionary, relentless, terrifying. And prophetic (of the First World War and the end of the past). But elegant? Urbane, seductive, sensuous? This astonishing performance is all that and more. Few orchestral accounts equal the colouristic range on offer here, or what I can only call its spatiality – its sense of breadth and depth. This is keyboard sorcery near the levels reported of Chopin and Liszt. No wonder the applause at the event itself (here trimmed) bid fair to outlast the performance.

The Mozart that opens this concert, at Buenos Aires's Teatro de Colón, is perhaps less finely coordinated and less textually immaculate, but its combination of vitality and lyricism makes light of all shortcomings, and the Sonata is transformed into an exhilarating instrumental operetta, celebrating the reunion of close friends after a long absence. Joy, style and spontaneity abound, though authenticists may find the liberally pedalled sound and the supple melodic contours too Romantic. The Schubert variations, however – enchantingly lyrical, beautifully paced and impeccably structured – are surely beyond cavil. A lone regret is the over-reverberant recorded acoustic. *Jeremy Siepmann*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★



## PARIS

**Works by Satie, Messiaen, Piazzolla, Legrand/Marnay/Barclay, Ravel, Kosma and Reinhardt**  
Alison Balsom (trumpet), Miloš Karadaglić (guitar); Guy Barker Orchestra/Guy Barker  
Warner 2564632789 52:04 mins

**BBC Music Direct £14.99**  
Paris can mean many things, but here it is the catalyst for musical diversity. Alison Balsom's album explores music not just by French composers, but also others associated with the city beyond the concert hall, such as Piazzolla and Django Reinhardt. Balsom's partner in this project is the jazz trumpeter Guy Barker with arrangements made for his orchestra.

Making arrangements for trumpet and orchestra of such thoroughly pianistic works as the slow movement of Ravel's Piano Concerto in G and 'Le Baiser de l'Enfant-Jesus' from Messiaen's *Vingt Regards* is certainly imaginative beyond the usual bounds of such collections. Unfortunately the results are not always musically convincing. The problem is less that the opening of the Messiaen, as arranged here, sounds like a palm court orchestra, but rather the pedestrian realisation at the point where it should fly off the page in an explosion of joy. The trumpet playing is exquisitely beautiful throughout, but, despite the bold concept, this CD is musically insipid and curiously homogenised. *Christopher Dingle*

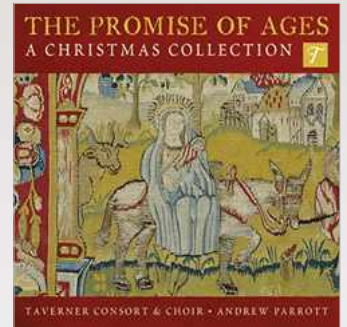
PERFORMANCE ★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★



## The Promise of Ages: A Christmas Collection

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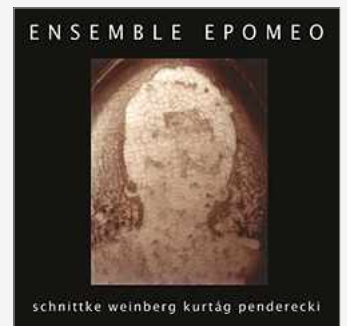


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# INSTRUMENTAL

*Viola de Hoog* plays JS Bach's Cello Suites with grace; *Mahan Esfahani* tackles Rameau's quirky harpsichord suites; and *Danny Driver* proves himself alive to Schumann's contrasting qualities

## MUSIC INSTRUMENTAL CHOICE

### Power and tenderness

*Erik Levi* enjoys Jonathan Plowright's perceptive approach to Brahms



#### BRAHMS

**Piano Sonata No. 2; Variations on an Original Theme, Op. 21/1; Three Intermezzos, Op. 117; Scherzo in E flat minor, Op. 4**

Jonathan Plowright (piano)  
BIS BIS-2117 (hybrid CD/SACD) 76:24 mins  
BBC Music Direct £13.99

Of Brahms's three early piano sonatas, the Second, dedicated to Clara Schumann, appears the least known and least characteristic. In some passages of the first movement, the composer seems almost to be following Liszt in juxtaposing impulsive technically challenging octave passages with more reflective lyrical material. Jonathan Plowright delivers this highly charged musical argument with tremendous momentum, but is careful to follow

**Plowright intimately projects the music's contemplative nature**

Brahms's meticulous pedal marks, thus ensuring that none of the full-blooded textures sound bloated.

Similar attention to detail is notable in the rest of this performance, the slow movement in particular distinguished by a magical control of colour and voicing.

Like the Sonata, the *Variations on an Original Theme*, dating from the mid 1850s, is also somewhat neglected, though its asymmetrical melodic phrase structure and harmonic richness are much more



**GENTLE STRENGTH:**  
Jonathan Plowright reflects Brahms's expressive world

typical of the mature composer. Here Plowright's refined pianism really comes into its own, the calm and often contemplative nature of the writing projected with great tenderness and intimacy.

Even more hypnotic is Plowright's wonderfully subtle approach to the Op. 117 Intermezzos. Some may take issue with the rather languorous tempo adopted for the second piece, particularly as Brahms marks it to be performed *Andante non troppo*. But such is the sheer beauty of sound and fluidity

of phrasing that the approach sounds completely convincing. For the final work in this imaginatively planned and warmly recorded recital, Plowright returns full circle to youthful Brahms with a mercurial account of the E flat minor *Scherzo*.

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★



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#### JS BACH

**Partitas Nos 1-6, BWV 825-830**

Igor Levit (piano)  
Sony 88843036822 151 mins (2 discs)  
BBC Music Direct £15.99

Igor Levit's first commercial recording, issued last year, was of Beethoven's last five piano sonatas, and proved to be a revelation, both of the sonatas and of the presence of a young interpretative genius. It won him a BBC Music Magazine Award. His London recital of the last three sonatas was just as impressive. This new recording is less of a sensation than that, partly because Bach's six partitas are not susceptible of such insights. They are less impressive, I find, than the French Suites, and some of Bach's other solo keyboard music. The exception is the supreme Sixth Partita, which ranges over a vast variety of dances and moods and has a great Sarabande which takes its opening from the Toccata that opens the work. This is Bach at his most commanding and the only recording of it I have heard that surpasses Levit's is Dino Ciani's, made live in Venice in 1971, on Deutsche Grammophon but now deleted.

Virtually every movement in these works has repeats and Levit dutifully plays them all. It seems to me that there is little point in doing that unless one introduces some variation of decoration or dynamics – in the latter Levit favours a restricted range. If the repeats are merely repeats there are times when one can get impatient.

All told, this is as fine a set of Bach's complete partitas as you will find in the catalogue, but it lacks the individuality which I had hoped for and expected: by this, I mean not self-advertisement, but a personal response to this music which, for all its appeal, needs a less monumental approach.

*Michael Tanner*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★



# REISSUES

Reviewed by Tim Parry

## CHOPIN

### Complete nocturnes

Earl Wild (piano)  
Brilliant 94930 (1997) 105:30 mins  
BBC Music Direct £10.99 (2 discs)



This stylish recording was made when Earl Wild was 80 (in the pianist's home, with rather boxy sound)

– a compelling blend of big-boned grandeur and touching vulnerability.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★

## PROKOFIEV • SHOSTAKOVICH

Prokofiev: Piano Sonatas Nos 2 & 8; Romeo and Juliet – nine piano pieces; Shostakovich: Preludes, Op. 34  
Lazar Berman (piano)  
Eloquence 480 7075 (1975/79) 101:03 mins  
BBC Music Direct £14.99 (2 discs)



Lazar Berman's Prokofiev has a penetrating focus and crisp articulation.

The Russian pianist's *Romeo and Juliet* pieces are superbly characterised and the playing is beautifully delicate.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★

## RACHMANINOV

Six Moments Musicaux, Op. 16; Variations on a theme of Corelli; Preludes (selection)  
Lazar Berman (piano)  
Eloquence 480 7078 (1975/80) 73:25 mins  
BBC Music Direct £11.99



Berman's DG legacy from the mid-to-late '70s includes this superlative Rachmaninov

selection, all played with lyricism and discerning panache. Glorious.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★

## SPANISH PIANO ENCORES

Works by Albéniz, Turina, Granados, Soler, Falla, Halffter and Montsalvatge  
Alicia de Larrocha (piano)  
Eloquence 480 7705 (1970-77) 80:37 mins  
BBC Music Direct £11.99



Alicia de Larrocha at her finest: this LP-and-a-half's worth of Albéniz, Granados, Falla, Soler and others captures this music's idiomatic heart, with ebullient rhythms, soulful melodies and exquisite tonal warmth.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★



## JS BACH

Cello Suites Nos 1-6, BWV 1007-1012  
Viola de Hoog (cello)  
Vivat VIVAT 107 134:08 mins (2 discs)  
BBC Music Direct £13.99

Dutch period-instrument musician Viola de Hoog has played at the highest level for three decades before undertaking the cellist's 'rite of passage': recording JS Bach's six Cello Suites. The CD liner notes comprise a scholarly and informative essay by Greta Haenen on the later 17th-century emergence of the cello, and de Hoog's own musings on the Suites. But the most tantalising questions – the improvisatory 'Stylus Fantasticus' of the Preludes; the dances' distant echoes of their functional origins; the sheer technical challenge of this summit of the cellist's repertoire – all these are magnificently answered in de Hoog's playing.

The Prelude of the First Suite is unusually spacious, its arpeggiated harmony building up unhurriedly. The Fourth's Prelude is almost suffocated by its lack of open-string resonance as it plunges into extreme keys. In the Fifth, which is really a French Overture in disguise, the fugal second section flows with nonchalant ease.

But it's in the dances that de Hoog is outstanding. They retain their essential character – the paired Minuets (Suites Nos 1 & 2), Bourrées (3 & 4) and Gavottes (5 & 6) sustain their common tempos, for instance – but they're full of nuances in rhythm and phrasing. Allemandes vary from lively and light-footed (No. 5) to deeply pensive, almost timeless (in the Sixth Suite, incidentally the longest of all 36 movements).

The playing is full of understated imaginative detail. And de Hoog stands virtually alone in playing the final Gigue (for five-string cello) without any significant distortion of the lively 6/8 pulse as she negotiates multiple-stopped chords with consummate ease.

Fine original period instruments – a Guadagnini from 1750 for Suites Nos 1-5, and a Bohemian five-string cello from c1780 for Suite No. 6 – and bows, and first-class recording, put this among the very best of the 42 versions I find I've accumulated over the years. *George Pratt*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★



FELICITOUS MENDELSSOHN:  
Javier Perianes moulds the piano works with affection



## MENDELSSOHN

Songs Without Words (selection); Andante con variazioni, Op. 83a; Rondo capriccioso, Op. 14; Prelude and Fugue in E minor, Op. 35/1; Variations sérieuses, Op. 54; Jagdlied, Op. 120/1  
Javier Perianes (piano)  
Harmonia Mundi HMC 902195 76:56 mins  
BBC Music Direct £14.99

If Javier Perianes was setting out to show the full range of Mendelssohn's genius as a writer for the piano, he has certainly succeeded with this disc, bearing out the message of the excellent sleeve note by Luis Gago that the composer 'lived with a Classical spirit in an era that sought to be Romantic'. The interweaving of *Songs Without Words* with more ambitious pieces works well. Perianes's singing right hand moulds the melodies with great affection, and my only concern is with the danger of affection turning into affectation, particularly in two areas: the delaying of 'surprise' harmonies, and the habit of playing notes in the right hand after those in the left. It's true that he is far from indiscriminate in applying either: the E Minor Prelude, for example, drives on wonderfully, a mass of expressive granite. But I'm less happy with the F sharp minor Song Op. 67/2 and with the final page of the *Variations sérieuses* where I feel less rhythmic waywardness would be an advantage.

Still, Perianes has not only an impeccable technique but the sharpest of ears for texture and for nuances at the lower end of the dynamic

range. Much of this disc is extremely beautiful, and all is very well recorded. Bland it is not. *Roger Nichols*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★



## RAMEAU

Premier livre de pièces de clavecin: Suite in A minor; Pièces de clavecin: Suites in E minor & D major; Nouvelles suites de pièces de clavecin: Suites in A minor & G minor; Menuet en rondeau in C; La Dauphine; Les petits marteaux  
Mahan Esfahani (harpsichord)  
Hyperion CDA 68071-2 128:27 mins (2 discs)  
BBC Music Direct £28.99

Rameau was a phenomenon. At the age of 50 he transformed French opera and became its leading figure for half a century. Along with composition, he was also one of the leading musical theorists of the day, but far from cultivating a dry musical accent, he was alive to seductive Italianate colouring. If not entirely radical, his first book of keyboard works – a single Suite in A minor – from 1706, published seven years before François Couperin's iconic *First Book of harpsichord music*, is a remarkable achievement. Its blend of tradition, in the opening unmeasured *Prélude*, and audacity, in the use of counterpoint and the catchy rhythms of the *Courante* – all captured with unfailing insight by Mahan Esfahani – is continually beguiling.

The E minor Suite of 1724 is better known, not least for the ear-catching 'Le rappel des oiseaux' played here with daring realism. Its companion



# Louis Schwizgebel

BBC New Generation Artist

Suite in D major is more overtly picturesque and delivered here with exemplary taste. The performance of the mainly illustrative later suites have similar elegance and poise without overstatement, not least in 'L'enharmonique' with its daring manipulation of harmony.

The harpsichord used is a customary 18th-century expansion of an early 17th-century Flemish harpsichord. The result preserves the sweetness of the Flemish treble register while benefiting from the famed power and resonance of French 18th-century instruments. Esfahani's playing is always considered and often brilliant. At times, the articulation could have been more delicately nuanced, but as a whole this is a splendid guide to Rameau's harpsichord music. *Jan Smaczny*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★



## SCHUMANN

**Novelletten; Nachtstücke; Romanze in F sharp, Op. 28/2**  
Danny Driver (piano)  
Hyperion CDA 67983 70:36 mins  
BBC Music Direct £13.99

One of Schumann's most striking and unsettling traits is his tendency to obsessive rhythm. It derived, apparently, from his passion for Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 101, especially the second movement. This quality of obsession, and those of narrative, fantasy, contrast and an imagination running riot, are often to the fore in the works that Danny Driver features here – not neglected pieces, but underrated.

Driver proves at once with the first *Novellette* that he is alive to the composer's robust, macho side and its inverse, those luminescent and melting atmospheres. Yet this is also a very Brahmsian piece, and Driver's full tone helps to display Schumann as a bridge from Beethoven to Brahms. As the set progresses there is lots to enjoy: Driver's fleet-fingered account seems to be relishing the second piece's tireless outer sections as well as the extreme tenderness and intimacy against which it is set – Schumann in full Florestan and Eusebius mode. His feel for rhythmic lilt in No. 4 is affectionate and transmutes in a twinkling between emotional states; and if obsession at high volume can irritate in No. 5, that is as much the composer's doing.

The *Nachtstücke* are similar in aspect to the *Novelletten*, though the last piece is especially noteworthy: marked 'Einfach' (Simple), it is surprisingly inward-looking, valedictory, oddly heartbreaking. Driver then concludes with the limpid *Romanze* in F sharp.

This is, in short, engaging and sophisticated playing with a fine mix of care and spontaneity. *Jessica Duchen*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★



## SCHUMANN

**Abegg Variations; Fantasiestücke, Op. 12 & Op. 111; Variations in E flat (Geistervariationen)**  
Andreas Staier (piano)  
Harmonia Mundi HMC 902171 59:52 mins  
BBC Music Direct £14.99

Andreas Staier's programme is enterprising, framed as it is by two sets of variations from opposite ends of Schumann's career, and including two series of 'Fantasy Pieces' separated by well over a decade. The dazzling *Abegg Variations* – Schumann's Op. 1 – stands worlds apart from the late *Ghost Variations* in E flat. The latter are like a voice from beyond the grave: Schumann was still working on them at the time of his final mental breakdown in 1854, convinced that their theme had been dictated to him by the spirits of Schubert and Mendelssohn. Staier, playing a pure-toned Erard piano of 1837, conveys its otherworldly aura very well. He makes a strong case, too, for the unduly neglected *Fantasiestücke* Op. 111 – one of those unified triptychs of pieces so characteristic of Schumann's later years.

The most familiar pieces here are the Op. 12 *Fantasiestücke*. In these, Staier is more successful with Schumann's good-natured humour than with the more impassioned side of his character. 'Aufschwung', for instance, lacks the impulsiveness and forward momentum needed to generate the 'upswing' of its title, while the dream-like confusion of 'Traumes Wirren' is not well served by Staier's comfortable tempo: its subdued excitement calls for far greater lightness and élan. There's a sense of fluency and continuity missing in some of the other pieces, too. The end-result is something of a mixed bag. *Misha Donat*

PERFORMANCE ★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★



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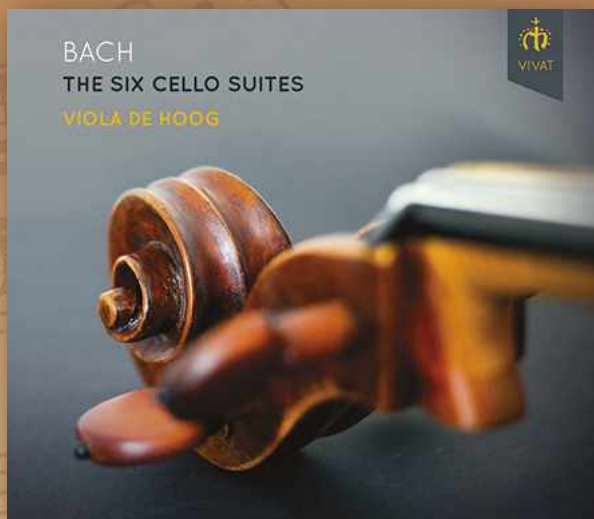
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# BRIEF NOTES

Your quick listening guide to more new releases, including rare solo piano works, Rimsky-Korsakov for piano duo and Stravinsky for three pianos

**Atterberg String Quartets Nos 2 & 3; Rangström String Quartet**  
Stenhammar Quartet  
CPO 777 270-2 £11.99



Unfailingly perceptive and idiomatic performances from the Stenhammar Quartet, bringing Rangström's scintillating textural drive and Atterberg's exultant lyricism fully to life. (JH) ★★★★★

**Beethoven Sonatas Nos 14 & 29; The Ruins of Athens (arr. Bax)**  
Alessio Bax (piano)  
Signum SIGCD 397 £12.99



Most of Bax's *Hammerklavier* (No. 29) is bracing and visionary, but the finale is hopelessly scrambled. Bax's *Moonlight* (No. 14) works well, and his arrangement of the *Ruins* is fun. (MC) ★★

**Negri Amorosa Fenice**  
Faenza/Marco Horvat  
Agogique AGO 018 £14.99



Superb premiere recordings of Negri and others, revelling in the Monteverdian 'New Music' of 17th-century Italy. Charming solo and duo *scherzos* contrast with impassioned monodies. (GP) ★★★★★

**Respighi • Pick-Mangiagalli Violin Sonatas, etc**  
Emy Bernicoli (violin),  
Massimo Giuseppe Bianchi (piano)  
Naxos 8.573130 £7.99



A fine performance of the Respighi, sensitive to its brooding soundworld, is invariably coupled with Pick-Mangiagalli's more tautly argued Sonata. (JH) ★★★★★

**Rimsky-Korsakov Sheherazade; Symphony No. 2**  
Goldstone and Clemmow (piano)  
Divine Art DDA 25118 £12.99



This top-flight piano twosome conjures scintillating keyboard colours in *Sheherazade*; *Antar* is also finely played, and Rimsky's 'Funiculi, funiculà' arrangement is a riot. (MH) ★★★★★

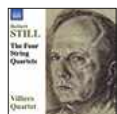


**Schumann Cello Concerto; Symphony No. 4**  
Oren Shevlin (cello); WDR Symphony Orchestra, Cologne/Heinz Holliger  
Audite 97.679 £14.99



An intimate account of the Cello Concerto from Oren Shevlin is tellingly offset by the Fourth Symphony's high drama, meticulously paced by Heinz Holliger. (JH) ★★★★★

**Still String Quartets Nos 1-4**  
Villiers Quartet  
Naxos 8.571353 £7.99



While Still's first two quartets are tonal and (mostly) bland, the Bartók-to-Seiber modernism of the Third and Fourth reveals remarkable musical strength. Fine performances. (MH) ★★★★★

**The Medici Castrato A homage to Gualberto Magli**  
Pe (countertenor), Granata (triple harp), Miller (theorbo)  
Glossa GCD 923501 £14.99



Magli's performance in Monteverdi's *Orfeo* (1607) was rapturously received. This slim-line account, with triple-harp and theorbo replacing lavish Mantuan forces, also includes entrancing songs and scenes from less familiar contemporaries. (GP) ★★★★★

**Ostsee Works by Von Bertouch, Theile and Vierdanck**  
Trondheim Barokk  
Simax PSC 1330 £14.99



Stylish performances reveal barely-known Baroque music from the Baltic Hanseatic capitals. While some is workaday and rambling, much is imaginative. (GP) ★★★★★

**The Pianos Trio Works by Boccadoro, Debussy, Offenbach, Shostakovich and Stravinsky**  
Stella, Tomassi, Griguoli (piano)  
Warner 2564628807 £14.99



This trio want to 'lay the foundations' for a three-piano repertoire. Their transcriptions of Shostakovich and Offenbach are a bit pointless, but the Debussy and Stravinsky justify the exercise. (MC) ★★★★★

**Postcard from Nalchik Works by Haydn, Shostakovich and Prokofiev**  
Edinburgh Quartet  
Delphian DCD 34081 £14.99



Seriously fine performances – exceptional in Shostakovich's Eighth Quartet – of an attractively varied programme. (The Prokofiev Quartet No. 2 was composed in Nalchik in the Caucasus.) (MH) ★★★★★

**Rarities of Piano Music 2013**  
Includes works by Grieg, Chopin, Sibelius and Ornstein  
Gimse, Neuberger, Sigfridsson, Angelov, Gölbadamova, Licad, Pizarro (piano)  
Danacord DACOCD 739 £14.99



An odd collection of pieces but some fascinating finds in the form of Sibelius's *Belshazzar's Feast* and Ornstein's remarkable Fourth Sonata; the pianism throughout is first-class. (MC) ★★★★★

**Sisters Includes works by Tchaikovsky, Brahms, Dvořák, Bizet, Fauré, Poulenc, Milhaud, Grainger and Stravinsky**  
Katia & Marielle Labèque (piano)  
KML Recordings KML 2124 £14.99



The Labèques describe this charming CD as 'the soundtrack to our lives', and it takes in everything from Brahms and Dvořák dances to Fauré's *Berceuse* and a virtuosic array of polkas. (MC) ★★★★★

**Sonates Françaises Violin Sonatas by Chevillard, Fauré and Gedalge**  
Jean-Jacques Kantorow (violin),  
Alexandre Kantorow (piano)  
No Mad Music NMM 001  
www.nomadmusic.fr



A threesome of violin sonatas from France's late 19th-century Belle Époque, played with sparkling virtuoso precision. Gedalge's First Sonata is a likeable discovery. (MH) ★★★★★

**Vienna 1709 Opera arias by Fux, Ariosti, Baldassare and Bononcini**  
Hana Blažiková (soprano);  
Ensemble Tourbillon/Petr Wagner  
Accent ACC 24284 £14.99



An ingenious collection of high-Baroque soprano arias with viola da gamba. Fux includes a chalumeau – a high point. Some hard-edged vocal tone, and reverberant acoustic, but enjoyable. (GP) ★★★★★

**Works for Viola & Piano Works by Vieuxtemps, Milhaud, Fauré, Debussy and Franck**  
Peijun Xu (viola), Paul Rivinius (piano)  
Profil CD PH 14012 £13.99



Peijun Xu's gloriously fulsome tone, immaculate intonation and precise tonal focus prove especially compelling in the Vieuxtemps and Franck Sonatas, alongside Milhaud's *Quatre visages*. (JH) ★★★★★  
Reviewers: Michael Church (MC), Malcolm Hayes (MH), Julian Haylock (JH), George Pratt (GP)



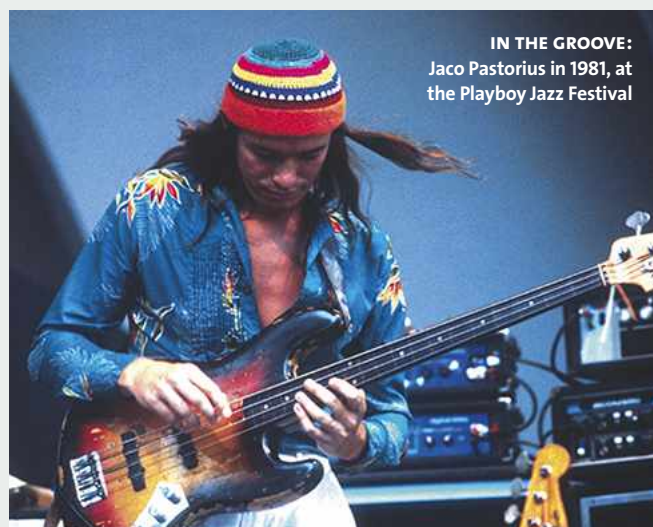
# JAZZ

Bass legend *Jaco Pastorius*'s 1980-82 recordings; a new release by Radio 3 New Generation Artist *Trish Clowes*; plus the *James Farm* quartet

## MUSIC JAZZ CHOICE

### All about the bass

*Roger Thomas* relishes a two-disc survey of bassist *Jaco Pastorius* from Warner's archive



IN THE GROOVE:  
Jaco Pastorius in 1981, at  
the Playboy Jazz Festival



#### JACO PASTORIUS

##### Anthology:

##### The Warner Brother Years

Jaco Pastorius (bass), Jack DeJohnette, Peter Erskine (drums), Wayne Shorter, Michael Brecker (saxophone) etc  
Warner 8122795729 70 mins (2 discs)

**BBC Music Direct** £12.99

This two-disc set follows usefully on the heels of the four-disc *Weather Report* retrospective *Forecast: Tomorrow* reviewed last issue. It's worth remembering that the seminal electric bassist was only a member of said group for

five years of its 15-year lifespan and that his work before and after this period, sadly curtailed by mental health problems culminating in a physical confrontation that left him with fatal injuries, was equally innovative. This set is mainly derived from *Word of Mouth*, *Invitation* and *The Birthday Concert*. Classics such as 'Come On, Come Over' from his eponymous 1976 solo album are owned by Sony, so we don't get them here, but the progressive and experimental title tracks of the first two source discs offer their own insights. The recorded sound of some of the extra material isn't immaculate but this is still a worthwhile collection, especially for new listeners.

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★

Hear an excerpt of this recording at [www.classical-music.com](http://www.classical-music.com)



#### JAMES FARM

##### City Folk

Joshua Redman (saxophone), Aaron Parks (piano), Matt Penman (bass), Eric Harland (drums)  
Nonesuch 7559795355 8 64 mins

**BBC Music Direct** £13.99

The music made by Joshua Redman's James Farm quartet is not as pastoral as the group's name suggests; the album title is nearer the mark. This collection of ten original tunes, written by all four members, seems to me to describe a journey through America's man-made canyons, out to the suburbs and beyond. Pianist Aaron Parks says each number is intended to be more like a story than a vehicle for improvisation. It's an apt description because the song arrangements do have a narrative thread rather than simply repeating choruses. The strength of the performance lies in the restraint shown by these four hugely gifted individuals: they're so focused on the balance and subtle tone colour of the group sound rather than on displaying their own technique. Five years on from the group's formation, this is only James Farm's second crop: they're in no hurry and it shows in the quality. *Garry Booth*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★



#### TRISH CLOWES

##### Pocket Compass

Trish Clowes (tenor & soprano sax), Gwilym Simcock (piano) etc, BBC Concert Orchestra/André de Ridder  
Basho 105172019 57 mins

**BBC Music Direct** £13.99

The release of *Pocket Compass* marks the culmination of Trish Clowes's

tenure as a Radio 3 New Generation Artist. All the pieces were written and arranged by her, and on three tracks her quintet, Tangent, is joined by the BBC Concert Orchestra. The album further explores her interest in mixing jazz instrumentation with chamber and symphonic ensembles, and cohesively accommodating composition and improvisation.

Her themes and harmonies are angular and quirky, and she shares Thelonious Monk's talent for building an overall sense of inevitability out of surprising details. As an improviser she achieves a similar melding of the unexpected and the inexorable, reminding me at times of Wayne Shorter in his halcyon days.

The tracks with orchestra are particularly interesting: neither aggressively 'Third Stream' nor falling into the dreaded 'jazz with strings' category. The BBC CO is used to supply some subtle but pleasingly brassy (and woodwindy) settings for the quintet. *Barry Witherden*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★



#### THE STANLEY CLARKE BAND

##### Up

Stanley Clarke (bass), Chick Corea (piano), Stewart Copeland (drums) etc  
Mack Avenue MAC1083 45 mins

**BBC Music Direct** £14.99

Bassist Stanley Clarke is no stranger to high-level jazz or pop collaborations, whether as a long-standing member of jazz supergroup Return To Forever, performing with pianist Chick Corea, or from recording with Paul McCartney. His aim, to bring the two worlds together on this latest release, is largely a success. Among the many highlights is the title track, where he underpins a driving groove with Stewart Copeland (of The Police) on drums. In this, and the soulful 'Pop Virgil', Clarke effortlessly shows his pioneering slap-funk bass technique. His mastery of *arco* double bass is also showcased: in the contemplative duet 'La Canción de Sofía' with Corea, or in the restless bebop of 'Trust'.

*Up* may be a little smooth in places for some, and those familiar with his 1975 hit 'School Days' might be puzzled why he has chosen to revisit it, but this disc is an invaluable addition to Clarke's discography. *Neil McKim*  
**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★



**SHOWSTOPPING:**  
Ellington leads his band at  
the height of their powers

## No. 174 Duke Ellington III

**Geoffrey Smith**, presenter of *Geoffrey Smith's Jazz*, on Ellington's landmark 1940 North Dakota concert



Years before the Coen brothers made *Fargo*, making North Dakota a mythic place for film fans,

it was already a legend with jazz lovers. In November 1940, two amateur sound engineers recorded the Duke Ellington orchestra at a local ballroom, capturing, almost by accident, a legendary band at the peak of its powers and in a setting that was its natural habitat. When *Duke Ellington at Fargo, 1940 Live* was released commercially in 1978, it won a Grammy and universal praise as a precious musical document on a par with Ellington's later appearance at Newport Festival.

But both those celebrated events (recommended in previous 'Jazz Starters') were formal occasions in august settings. The *Fargo* set is amazing in its informality, an aural snapshot of a great band doing the extraordinary thing it did on the road, working its wonders in casually brilliant star turns and potent ensembles. The immortal Ellingtonians are in cracking form: saxophone giants Johnny Hodges, Ben Webster and Harry Carney, trombonists Lawrence Brown and Tricky Sam Nanton, Jimmy Blanton, boy

genius of the bass, and the Duke himself, enthusing at the piano, as if *Fargo* was the only place in the world he wanted to be.

The group attacks Ellington masterworks as if they were brand new: a smouldering 'Koko' has a fiery edge even its classic recording can't match, and evergreens such as 'Sepia Panorama' and 'Across the Track Blues', are richly extended. There are superb features for Hodges and Webster never before heard on disc: Ben Webster was so pleased by his one-off meditation on 'Star Dust' that, over the years, he asked the *Fargo* team for copies.

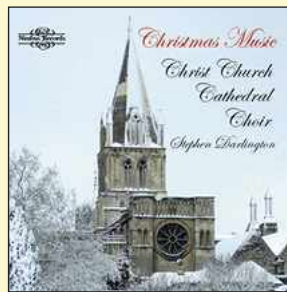
The band swings like mad, at once loose and precise, driven along by the drums of Sonny Greer, thriving in the moment. That spirit of great jazz on the wing more than compensates for occasional blips in the recording, which is generally fine, and gives us Ellington on the spot, for the ages. *Geoffrey Smith's essential guide to jazz, the '100 Jazz Legends' iPad*

### CD CHOICE



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# CHRISTMAS MUSIC



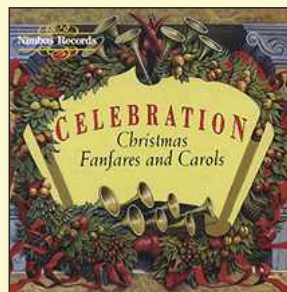
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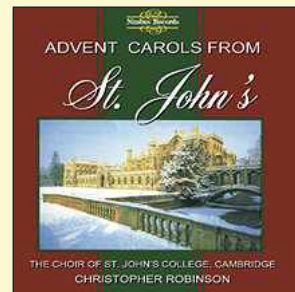
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**Christmas Lullabies**  
Charlotte de Rothschild, soprano  
Danielle Perrett, harp  
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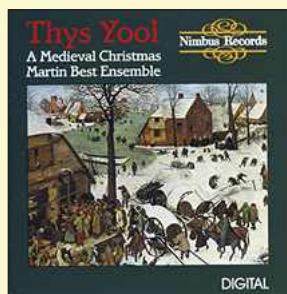
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**Celebration Christmas Fanfares & Carols**  
BBC Welsh Chorus  
Readings by Aled Jones  
NI 5310



Nimbus Records

**Advent Carols from St. John's**  
The Choir of St. John's College,  
Cambridge  
NI 5414



Nimbus Records

**Thys Yool A Medieval Christmas**  
Martin Best Ensemble  
NI 5137



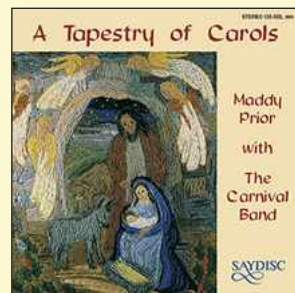
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**Christmas Classics**  
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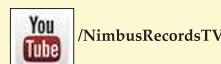
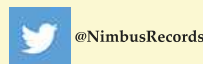
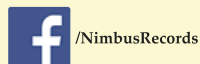
**The Spirit of Christmas Past**  
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# BOOKS

Pianist Susan Tomes explores the complex world of the chamber musician and the art of musical interpretation; plus a book and CD about the origins and history of some of the best-loved Christmas carols

## MUSIC BOOKS CHOICE

### Chamber music up close

Susan Tomes writes with thoughtful intelligence, finds *Helen Wallace*



#### SLEEPING IN TEMPLES

Susan Tomes

Boydell Press ISBN 978-1-84383-975-0  
263pp

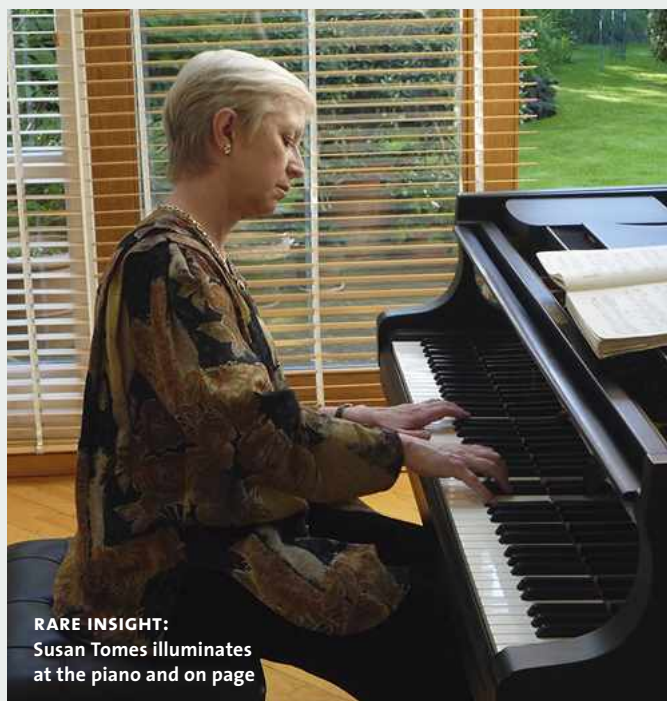
BBC Music Direct £19.99

Susan Tomes compares her first encounter with chamber music as akin to Dorothy's flight from her black-and-white homestead to the technicolour land of the Munchkins. One could extend the analogy to this book, where she plays Dorothy, unmasking not the *Wizard of Oz* but the hard-to-talk-about myths, conventions and fictions of the classical music world.

Her interrogation can be pitiless: she unveils the stark reality of

#### This unmask the hard-to-talk-about myths of classical music

a career in chamber music, its economic unviability, the 'dark bulk' of hours of rehearsal needed for each poorly-paid performance, weeks spent on administration, inevitable in-group resentments. Few meet her exacting standards: programme-note writers (whether analytical or biographical she finds their efforts pointless), critics with dogmatic standards learned from recordings, coughing audiences, polished young performers with nothing to say, greedy agents, conceptual artists who make money without skill or dedication.



**RARE INSIGHT:**  
Susan Tomes illuminates  
at the piano and on page

Tomes's rare position as a female authority figure in this realm has had its challenges, and a thread of grievance runs throughout. But her penetrating intelligence is refreshing in a discourse often reduced to cliché and lazy generalisation. Her thoughts on musical memory and interpretation draw us into a largely hidden world and she asks the hard questions: what is a performer actually doing? How do you play 'the contents, not the container' of the music? The concept of 'listening in' to a score is illuminating, capturing the complex relationship between a performer's imaginative understanding and a composer's attempt to codify their work. And

I love the idea of the musician as 'hermeneur', like Hermes, mediating between Gods and mortals. She draws powerfully on the wisdom of Sandor Végh, György Sebok and Hatto Beyerle.

Has this colossal commitment been worth it? One only has to think of Tomes's exceptional playing to understand why her faith still burns bright. The title refers to those who hope to incubate dreams by sharing a space with spirits. But we're left with a troubling vision: in a world where extraordinary music is diminished by its ubiquity, there have never been so many highly-trained musicians in search of a shrinking audience. ★★★★★



#### CHRISTMAS CAROLS: from village green to church choir

Andrew Gant

Profile Books ISBN 978-1-78125-352-6  
224pp (plus CD)

BBC Music Direct £9.99

Where do Christmas carols come from? There is, it seems, no easy answer. In the whistle-stop introduction to his new book, Andrew Gant repeatedly emphasises the obscure medieval origins of the genre. Starting with no particular connection to Christmas, as a vehicle for singing about 'drinking, eating and dancing', the carol morphed gradually into a carrier of seasonal and religious messages. Finally, from the 19th century onwards, it became formalised through the work of keen anthologists and tune collectors.

Gant covers that half-millennium of development in a brief 15 pages, and the results are inevitably sketchy and impressionistic. The rest of the book deals with individual carols – 22 of them, each given a potted history, with text and music printed at the end of the chapter. The choice of carols, though roughly linked to the chronology of the Christmas season, seems arbitrary, and is presumably based on Gant's own personal favourites.

Plenty of interesting detail emerges as the story of each individual carol is unravelled. The idea that carols happen by chance and serendipity is over-worked, however, and there's a sense that Gant is simply trying too hard to be quirky and 'accessible'. Do Tony Blair and Ed Miliband, for instance, really need to be caricatured as 'red-knuckled sons of toil' because they sing the tune 'O Tannenbaum' at the Labour Party Conference? Is the caroller's mention of a 'merry organ' in *The Holly and the Ivy* really the equivalent of him switching on his iPod?

This mix of scholarly enthusiasm – Gant, among other things, teaches at two Oxford colleges – and the chummy vernacular of the student refectory is an uneasy combination, and would probably work better in a lecture hall or on television than it does on paper. A CD of relevant carols sung by Vox Turturis is included, their direct eloquence a contrast to the over-eager nature of the writing. *Terry Blain* ★★



# AUDIO GIFT GUIDE

BBC Music Magazine's resident audio expert *Michael Brook* turns his ear to a selection of the best hi-fi kit for your Christmas wish-list



**MUST-HAVE  
CHRISTMAS  
AUDIO  
CHOICES**

**SOUND PRESENTS:**  
(clockwise from left)  
Monitor Audio S200;  
Denon HEOS; Ruark R1;  
Bang & Olufsen BeoPlay A2

## STREAMING SPEAKER Monitor Audio S200 £200

If space is at a premium, you would be forgiven for thinking that high-quality audio is out of the question. But Monitor Audio's Airstream S200 Wi-Fi speaker solves that particular problem as it appears to connect to every wireless streaming technology system under the sun. These include Bluetooth, Apple AirPlay and Monitor Audio's own Airstream Direct. But the S200 has also been designed to handle the best high-resolution files with all the flair you'd expect from these British hi-fi stalwarts. This stylish speaker is available in black or white. [www.monitoraudio.co.uk](http://www.monitoraudio.co.uk)

## MULTI-ROOM SOUND SYSTEM Denon HEOS from £249

Denon's HEOS surround-sound speaker system is sure to give its class-leading rival, Sonos, a run for its money. Three Denon speaker models are available which are designed for increasing room sizes. These range from the compact HEOS 3 (at £249) to the slightly bigger HEOS 5 (£349) to the HEOS 7 (£499) which sports a beefy subwoofer. All models have digital amplification and the ability to play all popular digital formats, including AAC and FLAC lossless files. They can also interact with the HEOS app, allowing wireless music streaming from Apple iOS and Android devices. [www.denon.co.uk](http://www.denon.co.uk)

## DAB/FM PORTABLE RADIO Ruark R1 Mk III £199.99

As compact digital radios go, there's not much to touch Ruark's R1 for sheer performance. The latest Ruark R1 Mark III model (see review in the December issue) introduces Bluetooth streaming for the first time, giving more connectivity options and enhancing the excellent FM and DAB tuning. Like previous R1 models, the latest Mark III version delivers soaring highs and lows of sound. And you'll be hard-pushed to beat Ruark Audio's winning combination of compact size, easy functioning and excellent speaker quality. [www.ruarkaudio.com](http://www.ruarkaudio.com)

## LUXURY BLUETOOTH SPEAKER B&O BeoPlay A2 £299

Bang & Olufsen's first Bluetooth speaker continues the Danish company's ethos of performance combined with gorgeous aesthetics. The BeoPlay A2 boasts a class-leading 24-hour battery life, combined with the peerless audio performance we have come to expect from Bang & Olufsen products. And performance is guaranteed thanks to Bluetooth aptX technology, which delivers pristine audio from this portable speaker. Available in black, gold, and green finishes with a leather handle, the A2 is sure to be a big hit this Christmas season. [www.bang-olufsen.com](http://www.bang-olufsen.com)



## BEST OF THE REST...

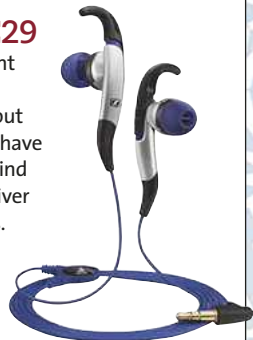
Michael Brook picks out more great gift ideas to suit every pocket

UNDER  
£30

### Sennheiser CX 685 £29

Standard earphones are not resistant to sweat. Yes, they might handle a few weeks of running or trips to the gym, but sooner or later they'll give up. The CX 685s have been designed with physical exertion in mind and, true to Sennheiser form, they also deliver admirably in the sonic performance stakes.

[www.sennheiser.co.uk](http://www.sennheiser.co.uk)



UNDER  
£50

### Kitsound Hive £49

Kitsound is one of those lesser-known brands with a capable range of products that few people know about. The Hive is a sturdy Bluetooth wireless speaker that's built to withstand the inevitable knocks that a portable speaker is going to take. It comes with a built-in rechargeable battery that delivers ten hours of power from a single charge.

[www.kitsound.co.uk](http://www.kitsound.co.uk)



UNDER  
£100

### Roth OLi RA1 £99

Coming in at just under £100, Roth's OLi RA1 stereo speakers deal a delightful slice of audio excellence for those who want a punchy set of speakers on a budget. The OLi RA1s defy the expectation of their price tag, built with reassuring heft and giving a strong sonic performance.

[www.rothaudio.co.uk](http://www.rothaudio.co.uk)



UNDER  
£200

### Ted Baker Rockall £180

Ted Baker may be best-known for stylish designer suits but it is now turning heads in the audio world. The Rockall headphones have been finely tuned by audio stalwarts to match anything in their price range. The styling is first rate, with three colour finishes, and the build quality should ensure that Ted Baker is handling your musical whims for years to come.

[www.tedbaker.com](http://www.tedbaker.com)



£200  
AND  
OVER

### Spaced 360 £250

The Spaced 360 Bluetooth speaker sound system is an *objet d'art* in its own right, but factor in an impressive audio performance and this portable powerhouse is also fantastic value for money. Its six separate speakers deliver convincing stereo sound regardless of where you are in relation to the device (see review in the September issue).

[www.spaced360.com](http://www.spaced360.com)



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BRYN TERFEL

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# LIVE CHOICE

## 20 UNMISSABLE EVENTS FOR CHRISTMAS 2014

As the festive season moves into full swing, we present the *BBC Music Magazine* guide to the very best Christmas concerts

 For detailed concert listings visit [www.classical-music.com/whats-on](http://www.classical-music.com/whats-on)

### 1 A FOUNDLING CHRISTMAS

Handel House Museum,  
London, 4 December  
Tel: +44 (0)20 7399 1953

Web: [www.handelhouse.org](http://www.handelhouse.org)

When, in 1750, Handel conducted a benefit performance of *Messiah* for the recently established Foundling Hospital it was so oversubscribed that bouncers were engaged to deter gatecrashers. Prefaced by Handel's dramatic Italian cantata *La Lucrezia*, The Amade Players reimagine the sort of seasonal music that the foundlings might have enjoyed during Handel's association with the Hospital.

### 2 YORK EARLY MUSIC CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL

York, 5-14 December

Tel: +44 (0)1904 658338

Web: [www.ncem.co.uk/xmas](http://www.ncem.co.uk/xmas)

York has a birthday beyond the obvious one to honour this Christmas, as La Serenissima celebrates its 20th anniversary with Vivaldi. In doing so, the early music ensemble sets off a festival that also braves Yuletide anarchy with Joglaresa's medieval 'Merriment and Misrule' and raises a glass to the 19th-century English village Christmas as recreated by The Mellstock Band. Plus Stile Antico savours festive cheer in Renaissance choral style.

### 3 KING'S COLLEGE CHOIR

Barbican, London, 6 December

Tel: +44 (0)20 7638 8891

Web: [www.barbican.org.uk](http://www.barbican.org.uk)

When the choir of King's College, Cambridge and Britten Sinfonia converge at the Barbican, it's Bach first and last, as the Brandenburg Concerto No. 2 and exuberant Magnificat begin and end a concert conducted by Stephen Cleobury. In between are Poulenc's *Quatre motets pour le temps de Noël*, and Respighi's *Lauda per la Nativita del Signore*.



IT'S A NUTCRACKER:  
Andrew Gourlay conducts  
Tchaikovsky (Choice 6)

### 4 THE SIXTEEN

St David's Hall, Cardiff, 7 December

Tel: +44 (0)29 2087 8500

Web: [www.thesixteen.com](http://www.thesixteen.com)

Halfway through its Monteverdi *Vespers* pilgrimage, Harry Christophers and The Sixteen undertake a seven-venue UK-wide tour focusing on the plainchant *O Magnum Mysterium* and how composers such as Palestrina, Victoria and Morten Lauridsen have incorporated it into their music. Woven throughout are traditional carols, plus settings by Warlock, Ives, Ireland and Will Todd.

### 5 THE THREE HARPS OF CHRISTMAS

Kellie Castle, Fife, 8 December

Tel: +44 (0)1333 720271

Web: [www.ruthwall.co.uk](http://www.ruthwall.co.uk)

Introduced by composer Graham Fitkin, who has arranged some of the music, harpist Ruth Wall delves into the back story of the Christmas carol using the modern concert



harp, the wire-strung Gaelic harp, and the medieval bray harp, complete with its characteristic braying buzz. As well as the *Cornish Sans Day Carol*, and *Corde, Natus ex Parentis*, Wall includes music by Debussy and Piazzolla. See Backstage, right

### 6 TCHAIKOVSKY'S NUTCRACKER

Bridgewater Hall,

Manchester, 10, 11, 14 December

Tel: +44 (0)161 907 9000

Web: [www.bridgewater-hall.co.uk](http://www.bridgewater-hall.co.uk)

It's Christmas Eve in the Stahlbaum household and, as the family sleeps, there's magic in the air. Gingerbread men slog it out with mice, while in the Land of Sweets, a Sugar Plum Fairy is keeping the throne warm for Clara and her Prince Charming. Ever since its premiere in 1892, *The Nutcracker* and Christmas have been something of an item. In performing the score complete here, conductor Andrew Gourlay and the Hallé are not cutting corners.

### 7 OPERA NORTH IN CONCERT

Town Hall, Dewsbury, 11 December

Tel: +44 (0)1924 324501

Web: [www.kirkleestownhalls.co.uk](http://www.kirkleestownhalls.co.uk)

The chorus and orchestra of Opera North take centre stage under Anthony Kraus for



CHRISTMAS IN YORK:  
La Serenissima heralds  
the festive season with  
Vivaldi (Choice 2)



the ebullient first part of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* together with music from Mendelssohn's unfinished oratorio *Christus*. There's technicolor razzmatazz from Nigel Hess's *Christmas Overture* based on favourite carols, and classic arrangements by the man who commissioned it: John Rutter.

## 8 THE CHOIR OF WESTMINSTER ABBEY

Cadogan Hall, London, 11 December

Tel: +44 (0)20 7730 4500

Web: [www.cadoganhall.com](http://www.cadoganhall.com)

The enterprising 'Choral at Cadogan' series goes from strength to strength. For Christmas, it's lured the Choir of Westminster Abbey to Chelsea; and, with John Taverner (1490-1545) at one end, and John Tavener (1944-2013) at the other, there's an illuminating timeline spanning some 500 years to be negotiated under director James O'Donnell.

## 9 ST JOHN'S SMITH SQUARE CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL

St John's Smith Square,  
London, 11-23 December

Tel: +44 (0)20 7222 1061

Web: [www.sjss.org.uk](http://www.sjss.org.uk)

From Charpentier to Schoenberg, the 29th St John's Smith Square Christmas Festival

casts its net widely to include debuts from Tenebrae and Ensemble Plus Ultra, whose 'Spanish Golden Age' programme marks the 450th anniversary of the death of El Greco. Other things don't change: conductor Stephen Layton and Polyphony return to wrap things up with Handel's *Messiah*, an unbroken tradition going back two decades.

## 10 ALAMIRE

Canongate Kirk,  
Edinburgh, 13 December

Tel: +44 (0)131 668 2019

Web: [www.gcs.org.uk](http://www.gcs.org.uk)

Edinburgh's intimate 18th-century St Cecilia's Hall is closed for refurbishment, but that hasn't deterred the Georgian Concert Society, whose season has sought sanctuary in two fine city churches. Holyrood's Canongate Kirk offers season's greetings to the Alamire vocal group, who interleave items from the 15th-century Trinity Carol Roll (including the *Agincourt Carol*) with Christmas music by Byrd.

## 11 PSALMODY

Town Hall, Hadleigh, 14 December

Tel: +44 (0)1904 651485

Web: [www.suffolkvillagesfestival.com](http://www.suffolkvillagesfestival.com)

As the Shakespeare 450th anniversary year draws to a close, musicologist Peter Holman

## BACKSTAGE WITH...



O CHRISTMAS TRIO:  
Ruth Wall performs on  
three different harps

## Ruth Wall

The title of your *The Three Harps of Christmas* tour tells its own story. Can you describe the harps you use?

The concert harp is the kind that you see in an orchestra and was developed in the Romantic era to meet the chromatic demands of composers. It has 47 strings, pedals to change key... and is big! The bray harp is a Renaissance instrument that has little 'bray pins' touching the bottom of the strings which give it sounds ranging from a silvery buzzing to an abrasive roar. And the gaelic string harp is from the west coast of Scotland and Ireland. It has metal strings that are played with the fingernails and makes a beautifully long, sustained sound.

Is it difficult changing from one type of harp to another mid-concert?

The three are very different from one another, and shifting from one to another is one of the things I have to practise most. However, it's also quite nice, in that they use different muscles, and so I have the chance to give certain muscles a rest!

Your concerts include festive works arranged by Graham Fitkin...

Yes. They are carols arranged by Graham in different ways. Some are easily recognisable straight away, while others are masked and revealed during the course of the piece. They are all extremely beautiful.

Is Graham a composer you have worked a lot with previously?

We've worked together for over 15 years. He didn't use to write much for the harp, but I think he began to get fascinated with it and liked the challenge of having an instrument that has restrictions harmonically – particularly in the case of the bray harp – but also throws up all sorts of other possibilities as a result of those restrictions. I also think he likes the idea of combining old and new – of doing something very different with such ancient instruments.

See Choice No. 5





**NORTHERN LIGHTS:**  
soprano Pumeza Matshikiza is in  
Liverpool, while (right) trumpeter  
Tine Thing Helseth heads to  
Manchester (Choices 16 and 12)

brings together the viols of The John Jenkins Consort, chamber choir Psalmody and soprano Claire Tomlin for one last seasonal salute to the Bard. Shakespearean London is evoked in the song arrangements of Richard Dering's famous 'The City Cries', while Tallis, Byrd and Gibbons contemplate the Divine.

## 12 TINE THING HELSETH

The Albert Hall,  
Manchester, 14 December

Tel: 0844 858 8521 (UK only)

Web: [www.manchestercamerata.co.uk](http://www.manchestercamerata.co.uk)  
Whether gilding Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* or upping the jubilation of Handel's 'Hallelujah Chorus', the trumpet is a Christmas decoration that gleams brightly. In Manchester's Wesleyan answer to London's Albert Hall, trumpeter Tine Thing Helseth joins the Manchester Camerata and conductor Nicholas Kraemer for Bach, Vivaldi, Albinoni and Corelli.

## 13 TEMPLE WINTER FESTIVAL

Temple Church, London, 15-19 December

Tel: +44 (0)20 7427 5641

Web: [www.templemusic.org](http://www.templemusic.org)

It might not mention Christmas in its title, but make no mistake: Temple Winter Festival has no intention of crying 'Bah! Humbug!'. The Norwegian Wind Ensemble accompanies the BBC Singers' *Messiah-with-a-twist*, Polyphony is enjoying 'An English Christmas' in the company of Howells and Warlock, Vox Luminis delves into Schütz and Scheidt, and there's a new work by Nico Muhly.

## 14 ULSTER ORCHESTRA

Ulster Hall, Belfast, 17 December

Tel: +44 (0)28 9033 4455

Web: [www.ulsterorchestra.com](http://www.ulsterorchestra.com)

Belfast Philharmonic Choir's double helping of Handel's *Messiah* safely stowed, the

Ulster Orchestra turns its attention to dishing up a tasty Christmas lunch under the direction of its leader, Tamás Kocsis. Rossini's sparkling Overture to *Cinderella* pulls a cracker with Corelli's *Christmas Concerto* before Kocsis wraps up warm for 'Winter' from Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* and hitches a lift aboard Mozart's *Sleigh Ride*.

## 15 ARMONICO CONSORT

Forum Theatre,  
Great Malvern, 19 December

Tel: +44 (0)1684 892277

Web: [www.malvern-theatres.co.uk](http://www.malvern-theatres.co.uk)

Last year, conductor Christopher Monks and the Armonico Consort offered Malvern a taste of Christmas in Venice. This time they turn to Germany and to that most Venetian of German composers, Heinrich Schütz. With wind power from The English Cornett and Sackbut Ensemble, Schütz's colourful re-telling of *The Christmas Story* is teamed with Praetorius's Mass for Christmas Morning.

## 16 ROYAL LIVERPOOL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

Philharmonic Hall,  
Liverpool, 18-23 December

Tel: +44 (0)151 709 3789

Web: [www.liverpoolphil.com](http://www.liverpoolphil.com)

Snow in Liverpool? No, it looks more like reindeer. For its 'Rudolph on Hope Street' series of afternoon concerts, the RLPO is inviting its audience members to meet a live reindeer, who will be waiting outside Philharmonic Hall. Then in the evening, Ian Tracey conducts the orchestra and its choruses, plus South African soprano Pumeza Matshikiza, in the annual 'Spirit of Christmas' extravaganza.

## 17 MESSIAH IN EDINBURGH

Queen's Hall,  
Edinburgh, 21 December

Tel: +44 (0)141 353 8000

Web: [www.dunedin-consort.org.uk](http://www.dunedin-consort.org.uk)

Following performances in Perth and Glasgow, the Dunedin Consort's traditional Handelian countdown to Christmas finishes off in Edinburgh's Queen's Hall – where *Messiah* comes in two sizes, the first of which is a matinee 'Children's *Messiah*' condensing the oratorio into a family-friendly 45 minutes. Mhairi Lawson, Rowan Hellier, Thomas Walker and David Shipley are the soloists under John Butt's invigorating musical direction.

## 18 MESSIAH IN CAMBRIDGE

St John's College Chapel,  
Cambridge, 20 December

Tel: +44 (0)7547 933704

Web: [www.eboracumbaroque.co.uk](http://www.eboracumbaroque.co.uk)

The college's regular choir may have long headed home for its Christmas break, but the chapel of St John's, Cambridge still resounds with music. In this instance, it's provided by Eboracum Baroque, an ensemble founded in 2012 to gather together talented young singers and

instrumentalists studying at some of the country's top musical institutions. Under director Chris Parsons, their festive calendar includes two performances of Handel's *Messiah* – one in Oxford (6 December) and, here, one in Cambridge.

## 19 STILE ANTICO

Wigmore Hall,  
London, 31 December

Tel: +44 (0)20 7935 2141

Web: [www.wigmore-hall.org.uk](http://www.wigmore-hall.org.uk)

The conductorless 12-voice vocal ensemble Stile Antico (see Choice 2) takes a sumptuous Christmas Mass by the 16th-century Flemish composer Clemens Non Papa as the starting point for a programme that swaddles it in Praetorius's double-choir Magnificat, as well as works by Eccard and Handl, plus Lassus's five-part motet *Resonet in laudibus*.

## 20 SCOTTISH CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Usher Hall, Edinburgh, 1 January

Tel: +44 (0)131 228 1155

Web: [www.sco.org.uk](http://www.sco.org.uk)

And so to the New Year. A river runs through the SCO's welcome to 2015, as the Hungarian conductor Gergely Madaras sets a course along the Danube between Vienna and Budapest. As well as works by all Strausses great and small, Brahms and Liszt are heard pining for Hungary, soprano Lucy Crowe sings Lehár, and Kodály's *Dances of Galanta* glitter.



# HANDEL MESSIAH

## DUNEDIN CONSORT

Director John Butt

**DECEMBER 2014**

**FRI 19th, ST JOHN'S KIRK, PERTH**  
7pm, Tel - 01738 621031 - £15-£19

**SAT 20th, KELVINGROVE MUSEUM, GLASGOW**  
8pm, Tel - 0141 353 8000 - £15-£20

**SUN 21st, THE QUEEN'S HALL, EDINBURGH**  
7pm, Tel - 0131 668 2019 - £12-£25  
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*„The Dunedin Consort's celebrated  
Messiah seems to get better every year,,*

THE GUARDIAN

[www.dunedin-consort.org.uk](http://www.dunedin-consort.org.uk)

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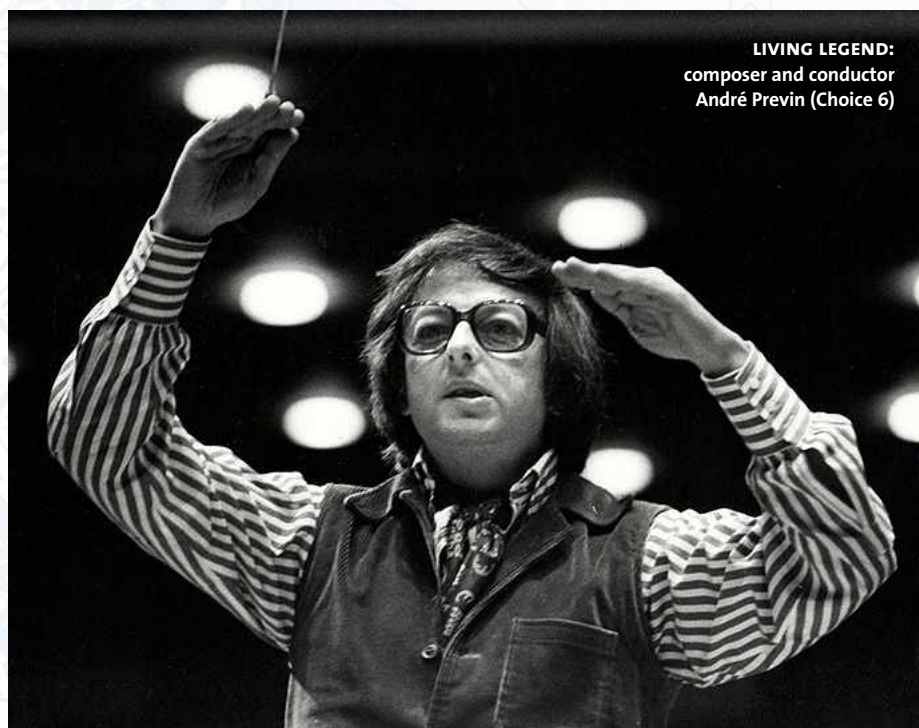


# RADIO & TV

## THE 20 BEST CHRISTMAS PROGRAMMES

This issue we pick the classical music highlights of the festive season. Full listings return next month

For weekly broadcast highlights visit [www.classical-music.com](http://www.classical-music.com)



**LIVING LEGEND:**  
composer and conductor  
André Previn (Choice 6)

### 1 ST JOHN'S COLLEGE ADVENT SERVICE

What better way to start the Christmas season than with the Advent Service from St John's College, Cambridge, where Andrew Nethsingha's choir is performing a work by Michael Finnissy. This new setting of a text on John the Baptist, from the York and Coventry Mystery Plays, has a lively, raw earthy quality, influenced by historical Spanish pilgrim songs. *Radio 3; Choral Evensong; Sunday 30 November; 3pm*

### 2 COOL YULE

The National Youth Jazz Orchestra is performing a special Christmas concert

packed with jazz versions of carols. Since 1965, Bill Ashton's band has been at the forefront of developing gifted jazz musicians from its ranks, including trumpeter Guy Barker. The concert will be packed with high-speed, white-knuckle arrangements of yuletide favourites. *Sky Arts 2; time and date tbc*

### 3 YEVGENY SUDBIN

Pianist Yevgeny Sudbin has been making his mark on the international scene with a technique that has been described as displaying 'volcanic intensity'. In this Wigmore Hall recital he performs a work by his fellow-Russian Prokofiev: the 1942 Piano Sonata No. 7. This reflects its wartime creation in ferocious

and exhilarating music which frames one of his most poignant slow movements.

*Radio 3; Live in Concert; Tuesday 2 December; 7.30pm*

### 4 ROSSINI'S IL BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA

Rossini is said to have composed this hugely successful comedy opera in just two weeks. The plot draws on an earlier Beaumarchais play about Figaro than the one used by Mozart (Choice 9). In this Met Opera production mezzo Isabel Leonard is the feisty Rosina and Christopher Maltman plays Figaro, singing the famous baritone aria 'Largo al factotum'.

*Radio 3; Saturday 6 December; 6pm*

### 5 SWINGIN' CHRISTMAS WITH JOHN WILSON

Michael Parkinson presents a festive celebration with one of the runaway success stories of the BBC Proms, the John Wilson Orchestra. Wilson, who is known for his restoration and arrangements of old swing-era scores, serves up a programme of timeless festive musical treats, including 'Winter wonderland' and 'Let it snow'. The singers include Anna-Jane Casey and Curtis Stigers. *BBC Four (rpt); date and time tbc*

### 6 ANDRÉ PREVIN

Tune in this month to hear André Previn as the subject of Radio 3's *Composer of the Week*. As well as his career as a conductor, notably with the LSO, Previn has been a composer of classical, jazz and film music. Sometimes affectionately known as 'Mr Andrew Preview' from his Christmas 1971 *Morecambe and Wise Show* appearance, Previn's prolific output includes a Guitar Concerto (1972). In 2003 he composed a Violin Concerto for his former wife Anne-Sophie Mutter.

*Radio 3; Composer of the Week; from Monday 15 December; 12 noon*

### 7 ALICE SARA OTT

Young German-Japanese pianist Alice Sara Ott rounds off November's LSO St Luke's Young Pianists series in style by tackling Liszt's fiendishly difficult *Grandes études de Paganini*, including the twinkling 'Campanella' (No. 3). She gets off to a stormy start with Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 17 in D minor 'The Tempest'.

*Radio 3; Lunchtime Concert; Friday 19 December; 1pm*

### 8 HANDEL'S MESSIAH

From its first performance in Dublin in 1742, Handel's *Messiah* has grown to be an essential Christmas fixture, with performances by choral societies everywhere. For a historic setting, it's hard to top London's 12th-century Temple Church, which hosts the BBC Singers under David Hill and the Norwegian Wind Ensemble. The line-up of soloists includes soprano Fflur Wyn,



countertenor Robin Blaze, tenor Samuel Boden and bass David Soar.  
**Radio 3; Live in Concert;**  
**Friday 19 December; 7pm**

## 9 MOZART'S MARRIAGE OF FIGARO

Mozart's 1786 opera, his first collaboration with librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte, was a successful transformation of a banned Beaumarchais play. Director Richard Eyre transports the plot to a Seville manor house in the 1930s in this stylish Met Opera production. Figaro is played by bass-baritone Erwin Schrott, and soprano Rachel Willis-Sørensen is his bride-to-be, Susanna.  
**Radio 3; Opera on 3; Saturday 20 December; 6pm**

## 10 CHRISTMAS MUSIC DAY

Radio 3 takes its annual excursion to Christmas celebrations around Europe on 21 December, starting in the snowy reaches of Lapland before visiting historical churches in Prague, Reykjavik and Stockholm. There's festive music throughout, including Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite No. 1* and Poulenc's 'Hodie Christus Natus Est' from *Quatre Motets pour le temps de Noël*, Op. 152.  
**Radio 3; Christmas Music Day; Sunday 21 December; from 1pm**

## 11 JS BACH'S MASS IN B MINOR

One of Bach's last compositions, his Mass in B Minor took over two decades to bring to fruition, before completion in 1749. With 27 movements, it takes its place at the pinnacle of his achievement. Stephen Layton is conducting the Choir of Trinity College, Cambridge and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment at St John's Smith Square. And, among the soloists, countertenor Iestyn Davies is singing the sublime Agnus Dei.  
**Radio 3; Live in Concert; Monday 22 December; 7pm**

## 12 CHRISTMAS CAROL COMPETITION

Could there be another famous Christmas carol in the making? Radio 3 listeners will have a chance to decide in the first *Breakfast* Christmas Carol Competition. After setting the words of a poem by Susan Hill to music (entitled *Can it be True*), entrants will be whittled down to six, before listeners can vote. The winner will be revealed in a *Breakfast* performance with the BBC Singers.  
**Radio 3; Breakfast; Tuesday 23 December; 6.30am**

## 13 FESTIVAL OF NINE LESSONS & CAROLS

This annual service from King's College, Cambridge has become one of the great

**CAROLS BY CANDLELIGHT:**  
 Stephen Cleobury and the  
 choir of King's College,  
 Cambridge (Choice 13 & 14)



Christmas traditions since its inception in 1918, with radio broadcasts beginning in 1928. The lucky few, who queue up before 9am to get a seat, are joined by millions of listeners for this highlight of the Christmas calendar. Tune in to hear performances of classic carols and this year's specially commissioned work (tbc).  
**A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols;**  
**Radio 4; Wednesday 24 December, 3pm;**  
**Radio 3; Thursday 25 December, 2pm**

## 14 CAROLS FROM KING'S

Cambridge also takes pride of place on BBC TV with the traditional televised service from King's College Chapel. With microphones planted all over the Chapel's vast vaulted ceiling and a pack of TV cameras ready for action, the pressure is on for the solo treble to deliver the first verse of *Once in Royal David's City*. This is the moment, for many, that starts Christmas, as Stephen Cleobury leads his choir in this spectacular candlelit service.  
**BBC Two; Carols from King's; Wednesday 24 December, time tbc**

## 15 WAGNER'S TRISTAN UND ISOLDE

Wagner called *Tristan und Isolde* 'the most full-blooded musical conception'. The opera's mix of medieval folklore, illicit love and era-defining orchestration has inspired many composers, as has the opening's striking 'Tristan chord'. Christof Loy's Royal Opera House production features tenor Stephen Gould and soprano Nina Stemme in the title roles with a dinner party as the backdrop.  
**Radio 3; Opera on 3; Wednesday 27 December; 5pm**

## 16 PRIVATE PASSIONS

For many, a James Bond film is part of Christmas tradition. And Radio 3 is featuring classic Bond actor Roger Moore in *Private Passions*. It's hard to predict what the choices

will be but, if *Desert Island Discs* is anything to go by, there may be a Verdi prelude or Puccini aria. Perhaps he might even opt for the *Andante* from Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 21, as heard in *The Spy Who Loved Me...?*  
**Radio 3; Private Passions; Sunday 28 December; 12 noon**

## 17 HERE WE COME A-WASSAILING

The Victorians may have created many of our Christmas traditions but the custom of house-to-house carol singing harks back to Anglo-Saxon times. The word 'wassailing' appears to be derived from the Old Norse *ves heill*, meaning 'be well and in good health', and it involved singers in rural communities singing for the reward of a cup of hot cider. Radio 3's Lucie Skeaping investigates.  
**Radio 3; Early Music Show; Sunday 28 December; 2pm**

## 18 CHORAL EVENSONG

For over 30 years Ralph Allwood's Rodolfus Choir has remained one of the UK's finest young choirs, with members drawn from the ranks of Eton Choral Courses. This New Year's Eve it will be performing a festive choice of works (programme tbc) in the elegant setting of St Gabriel's Church, Pimlico.  
**Radio 3; Choral Evensong; Wednesday 31 December; 3.30pm**

## 19 LAST NIGHT OF THE PROMS 2014

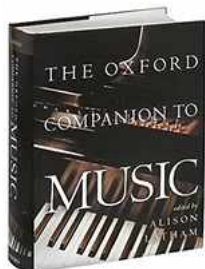
Just in case you missed it, here is another chance to catch the Last Night of the Proms. The evening begins with Gavin Higgins's *Velocity*, a musical roller-coaster that lives up to its name. And violinist Janine Jansen is among the guests appearing with the BBC Symphony under Sakari Oramo. Listen out for an unexpected violin duet between her and the conductor.  
**Radio 3; Proms 2014 (rpt); Wednesday 31 December; 9pm**

## 20 NEW YEAR'S DAY CONCERT IN VIENNA

The New Year is getting off to a waltzing start with this celebration of Viennese music, live from the city's Musikverein. Conductor Zubin Mehta is raising the baton for this annual Vienna Philharmonic concert that features the works of the Johann Strauss family.  
**Radio 3; New Year's Day Concert; Thursday 1 January; 10.15am, BBC Four; time tbc**

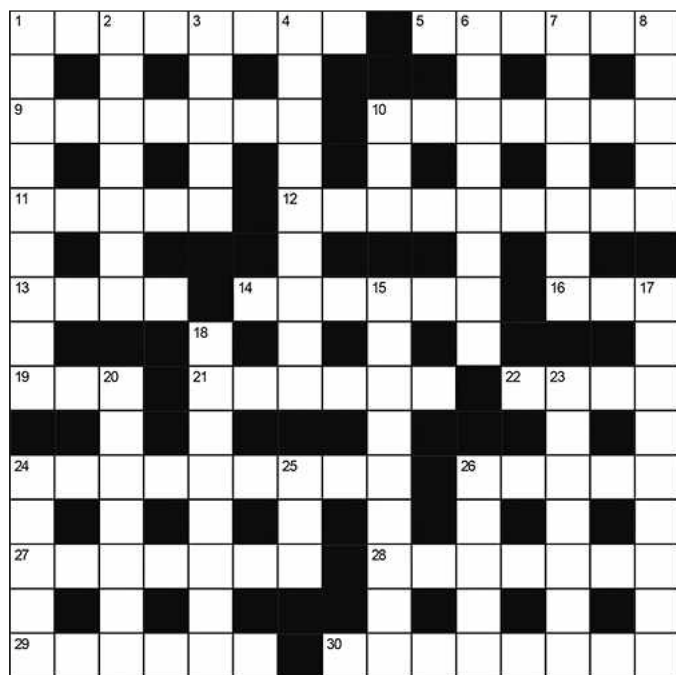
**QUIZ ANSWERS**  
 1. Tenor  
 2. The Sixteen  
 3. Musorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition; Ravel  
 4. a) Respighi; b) Britten;  
 c) Bernard Hermann (he was credited as Sound consultant)  
 5. Albeniz; The Rhenish  
 6. Mozart  
 7. Orff's Carmina Burana  
 8. The Mikado; Yum-Yum; Pitt-Sing and Peep-Bo  
 9. Job  
 10. Michael Berkeley  
 11. John Dowland  
 12. Steve Reich





# Christmas prize crossword No. 276

The first correct solution of our monthly crossword to be picked at random will win a copy of *The Oxford Companion to Music* worth £40 (available at bookstores or [www.oup.co.uk](http://www.oup.co.uk)). Send your answers to: *BBC Music Magazine*, Crossword 276, PO Box 501, Leicester, LE94 0AA to arrive by 23 December (solution in our March 2015 issue). *Crossword set by Paul Henderson*



## ACROSS

- 1 26d's was 12: harps do dancing, ending in disarray (8)
- 5 Composer supports entertaining the Queen (6)
- 9 Ballerina is more than half lovely (7)
- 10 I had time to follow school Head of Music to see German composer (7)
- 11 5's was 12: contralto enthralled by Nielsen, perhaps (5)
- 12 Bartok, say, suspended note after operatic song (9)
- 13 Do, re, me, fa, so or la? (4)
- 14 Contralto has to carry line, fools (6)
- 16 Singer Criswell in *King and I*, opening in March (3)
- 19 Novel music incorporating wood (3)
- 21 Strive to play proposed theme of Gershwin 1a (6)
- 22 Musical work: some Delius upon retiring (4)
- 24 French dance, remote, and accompanied by a Spanish cry (9)
- 26 US tenor finding shelter by church (5)
- 27 Approves backing hero in song sung by those 5 and 26d (7)
- 28 Fool participating in ululation sung by those 5 and 26d (7)
- 29 Excellent fruit returned by *Otello* character (6)
- 30 Second lead in *Tosca* gives voice: has trouble starting (8)

## DOWN

- 1 Wild Canadian ignoring one American, brought in about weather ritual (4,5)
- 2 Not supporting a win over soprano and tenor (7)
- 3 Unhappy about conductor's debut, identifying what conductor uses (5)
- 4 I had live broadcast involving introduction from German impresario (9)
- 6 Contributor to theatre hears everyone prepare for concert (8)
- 7 I think vaguely about a Dutch maestro (7)

- 8 Vaughan Williams ballet character represented Santa (5)
- 10 Native ballad left incomplete (3)
- 15 Group seeming to be very inclined to get 5 and 26d! (3,3,3)
- 17 Composer, homeless, wandering round college (9)
- 18 Flying bird is in something sung by those 5 and 26d (8)
- 20 Radio expert to spoil broadcast of icon (7)
- 23 Unusual restricting recording after piano's set up (7)
- 24 Choreographer picked up some suppleness often (5)
- 25 Admit one weak note for starters (3)
- 26 Composer's last character in roster (5)

## OCTOBER SOLUTION NO. 273



## OCTOBER WINNER

Mrs M Gilchrist, Midlothian

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## THE MUSIC QUIZ

*We hope it doesn't take you 12 Days to complete our quiz*

1. With which voice type do you associate the singers Ian Partridge and Peter Pears?
2. Which renowned choir's *The Voice of the Turtle Dove* has been one of this year's highest-selling recordings?
3. 'The Hut on Hen's Legs' is the penultimate movement of which 1874 work for solo piano? And which French composer famously orchestrated it in 1922?
4. The following all describe works called *The Birds*. Name the composers: a) a 1928 orchestral suite, based on music of the 18th century; b) a 1929 song that sets words by Hilaire Belloc; c) a 1963 film soundtrack that features the instrument the *Trautonium*.

5. In Wagner's *Ring* cycle, who forges the ring? From whom does he steal the gold to make it?

## PICTURE THIS

6. *The Goose of Cairo* (below) is a comic opera that was begun by which composer in 1783 but left incomplete at the time of his death?



7. In which 1936 choral work does a swan that is being cooked for dinner gloomily recall how it 'once swam on lakes'?

8. 'Three little maids from school are we' is a hilarious trio from which Gilbert and Sullivan opera? And what are the names of the three maids in question?

9. To which stage work depicting a biblical character did Vaughan Williams add the subtitle 'A Masque for Dancing' because he disliked the word 'ballet'?

10. In March 2013, which Radio 3 presenter became the first composer since his godfather, Benjamin Britten, to enter the House of Lords?

11. 'Captain Digorie Piper his Galliard' is one of several galliards appearing in which composer's *Lachrimae or seaven teares* collection, published in 1604?

12. Scored for at least nine percussionists and lasting between 55 and 75 minutes, the 1971 work *Drumming* is by which composer?

See p103 for answers

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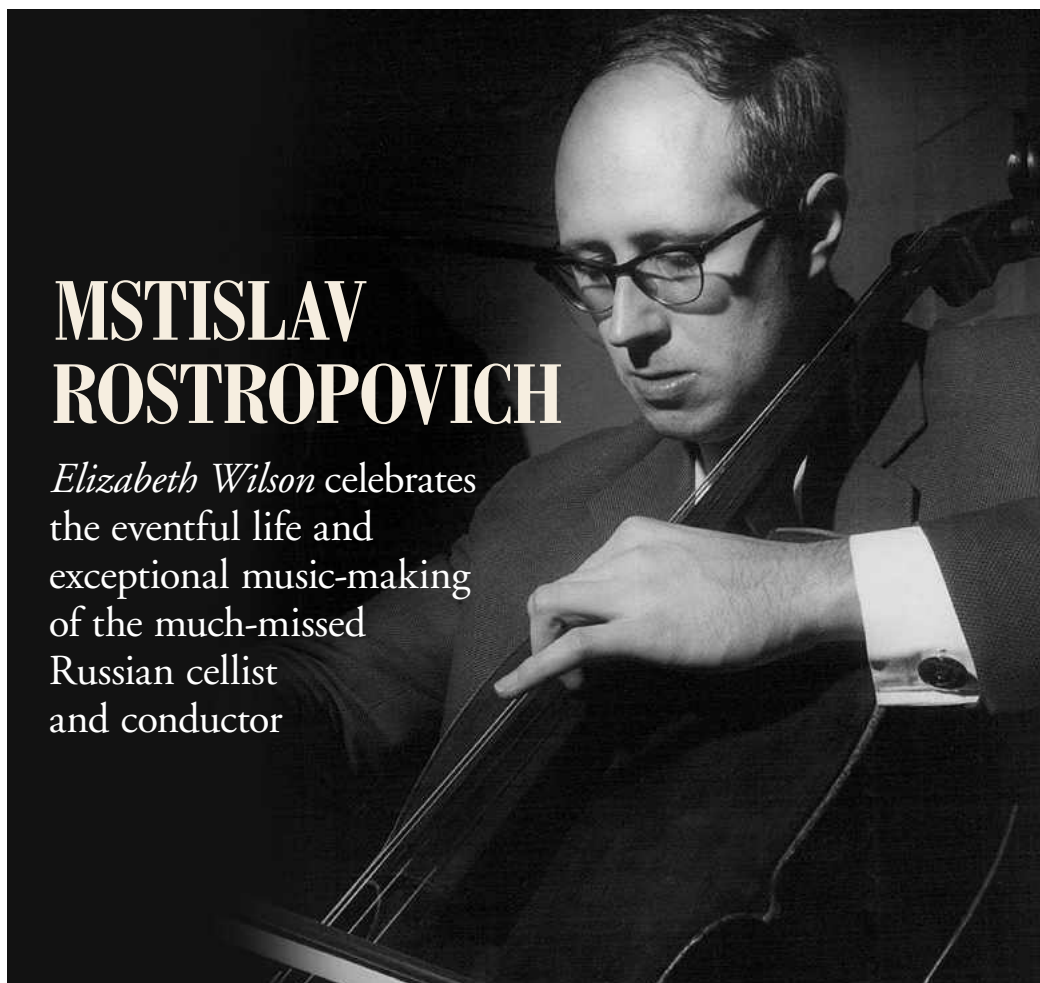
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## Michael Nyman

*Nick Shave* looks at the music of the hugely successful contemporary minimalist composer

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# Renée Fleming *soprano*

**M**y parents were both singing teachers so, although I sang and learnt the piano, when they came home from work music was the last thing they wanted to hear! I can clearly picture the LP cover of Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* and as a small child I could sit and listen to that, allowing my imagination to follow it.

When I was in high school I was chosen to attend a composition class with a post-graduate from Eastman School of Music. I can remember the first classroom I was sitting in when he played **PENDERECKI's** *Threnody, 'To the Victims of Hiroshima'*. It made such an impact on me: it was so unbelievably powerful, and spoke to me in a whole new musical language. At that time, pieces like Brahms's symphonies seemed predictable to me, whereas I remember being so struck by Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*, particularly Anne Trulove's song 'I go, I go to him', which felt startlingly fresh.

My journey towards a career in music was incremental; there was no decisive moment. It was when I sang Countess Almaviva in **MOZART's** *Marriage of Figaro* that I made my breakthrough, in all the major European houses and many big American ones. It's such a demanding role, you need courage. I worked with conductor Christoph Eschenbach in Houston, who coached me intensively. I've sung in so many productions and I love the way the Countess can be played not as the victim, but one at the centre, controlling everyone else!

If the 1990s was my Mozart decade, then the 2000s belonged to **RICHARD STRAUSS**, from *Arabella* to *Capriccio* to the *Four Last Songs*. My favourite role has to be the Marschallin from *Der Rosenkavalier*: she is the most multi-layered and nuanced of Strauss's heroines and one of the most interesting female characters in the whole opera repertoire. Soprano Elisabeth Schwarzkopf was the one who really knew how to declaim the words in that part – which is almost more of a speaking than a singing part – and how to make it work. She changed the way singers approached text.

I'm passionate about encouraging more composers to create interesting female roles. Mark-Anthony Turnage's *Anna Nicole* is one, and I'm thrilled that **ANDRÉ PREVIN's**

**MODERN TIMES:**  
'The best songwriters  
have been working  
in popular music'



RENÉE FLEMING IS one of the world's most celebrated sopranos. In 1988 she won the Metropolitan Opera auditions and made her debut as the Countess in Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* at Houston Grand Opera. Roles written for her include Rosina in John Corigliano's *The Ghost of Versailles*. Fleming sang for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee at Buckingham Palace and in 2014 she became the first classical artist to sing the US national anthem at the Super Bowl. On her new disc, *Christmas in New York*, she is joined by Yo-Yo Ma and Wynton Marsalis.

*A Streetcar Named Desire* is coming into its own. Blanche is a fascinating character, and was written for me. As creative consultant at Chicago Opera I've been able to help bring my friend Ann Patchett's book *Bel Canto* to the stage, through commissioning composer Jimmy López and librettist Nilo Cruz.

I'm interested in giving song recitals, and I have been lucky to work with living composers on songs too, recently those by Anders Hillborg. A recording which changed my way of thinking was baritone Christian Gerhaher's disc of **WOLF's** *Italian Songbook*: I listened to his interpretation of 'Sterb' ich, so hüßlich

in Blumen meine Glieder' and realised that something has changed: his intense intimacy, that almost whispered quality, suggested a way forward, very different to the declamatory styles of the past.

That leads on to *Dark Hope*, my album of rock covers, by writers like Leonard Cohen. I feel that since contemporary classical music cut itself off into a rather small niche, the best songwriters have been working in popular music. It was fascinating to discover a new way of singing, where the less voice I used the better. Young singers ask me, 'Can we do that?' but I remind them that we're the heavy-lifters of the vocal world. There are no short-cuts to preparing our voices for the projection needed on stage, unamplified. Once you've done that, then by all means let your hair down. ■

*Interview by Helen Wallace*

## RENÉE FLEMING MUSIC CHOICE



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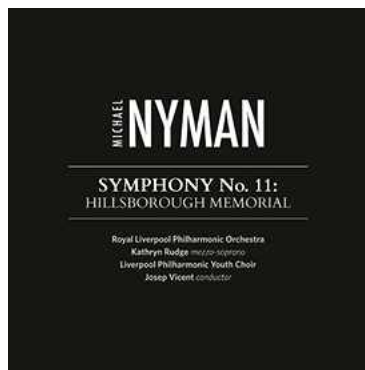
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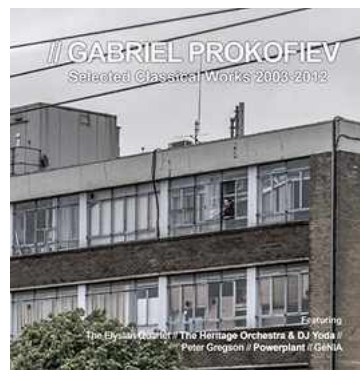


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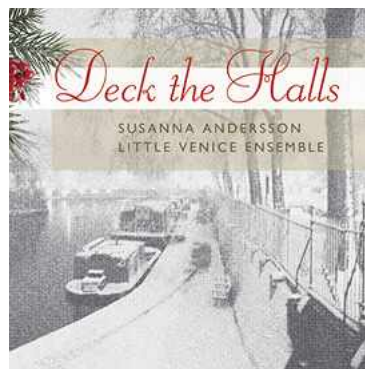
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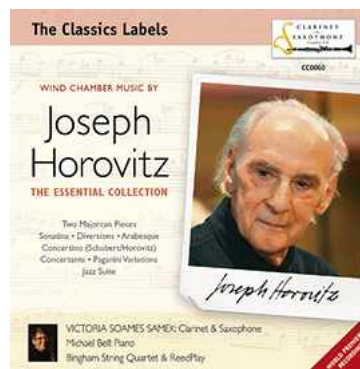


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